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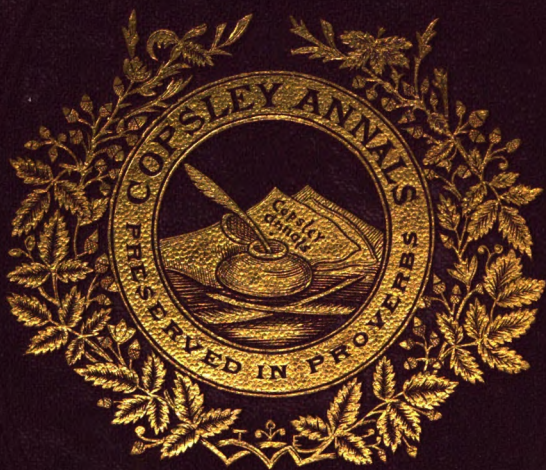
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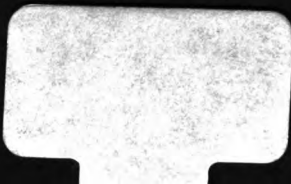
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COPSLEY ANNALS

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Tale

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“VILLAGE MISSIONARIES,” “WAYSIDE PILLARS,”
“UNDER THE MICROSCOPE,” ETC. ETC.



SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, 54 FLEET STREET.
LONDON. MDCCCLXVII.

PREFACE.

The following Sketches are not of sufficient importance to demand a lengthened apology. The last of the series should, however, be prefaced with the assurance that in all essential particulars the story is true. The occurrences forming the basis of the narrative took place in a parish with which the Author has been intimately associated; and at the time created considerable excitement in the immediate neighbourhood.

If the family chronicles which form this volume shall succeed in successfully beguiling a weary hour unclaimed by more serious avocations, they will not altogether fail of the purpose with which they have been sent forth. Nor will the further aspiration be deemed an ambitious one, that, when any passing amusement which they may furnish shall have evaporated, some sediment not wholly valueless may remain.

August 1866.

CONTENTS.

Chap.		Page
I.	EDITORIAL	I
II.	ALICE : HER STORY.	
	‘ <i>Have you heard the proud lady’s distaff ?</i> ’	7
III.	HARRY : HIS STORY.	
	“ I can’t ” <i>lies down at the bottom of the tree :</i>	
	“ I will ” <i>climbs it</i>	69
IV.	MRS. BLACKETT : HER STORY.	
	‘ <i>Who goes a-mothering finds violets in the lane</i> ’	131
V.	OUR LADY OF COPSLEY : HER STORY.	
	‘ <i>Flowers from wee Fanie’s garden</i> ’	253
VI.	MASTER CLARKE : HIS STORY.	
	‘ <i>They’re folks of Mar Topham’s trade</i> ’	269



EDITORIAL.

WHAT an excuse is furnished by the children for many an hour's holiday to their elders! And how necessary to any complete social organization, as, also, to any rightly-constituted mind's enjoyment, is intercourse with the little ones who, after all, are the nearest links connecting our human nature with innocence and unworldliness—tarnished links, and fragile, though they be.

'The children's hour' had come to a close at Copsley one winter's evening; and our Janie, with five contemporary cousins, had, on the sounding of its knell by the clock in the hall,

B

been despatched to upper regions to dream over past delights and future pleasures.

It had been a particularly successful evening —its crowning amusement a recital of the adventures of Richard the First by land and water, with sundry fancy illustrations from Harry's pencil, finishing up with a charade in the dining-room, where, before the closed window-curtains, a romantic-looking Blondel, with a Spanish cloak and a hat and feather suspiciously like Mary's, sang to a guitar in words of pitiful anxiety for his royal master. From within the enclosure, supposed by a stretch of imagination to be the prison tower, sounded, after a pause, return stanzas to the same melody; and great was the applause and acclamation when a telling finale wound up a recital in what by courtesy was entitled blank verse, descriptive of the royal captive's sorrows and imprisonment :—

‘Go, faithful minstrel, tell my hapless state :
Let England learn her monarch's cruel fate,
While Richard still a rescue doth await.’

How it happened that the long recitative here took the form of a duet was not clearly to be accounted for by the children, who asked if King Richard sang with two voices from the

tower ; but who were banished from the room before Alice and Robin came forth from their retreat.

And when the six had been finally despatched, the fire-side conclave which properly succeeds to the children's departure began ; being ever held before that last hour of all in the day when the golden grain of its history is secretly winnowed from the chaff, and laid by in store for the future.

And our talk fell upon the manner in which each family has histories and allusions, sayings and fragments of song, which are its own exclusively and none others' ; and we said how, if we were to be scattered to the ends of the earth, and tattooed and painted out of all resemblance to our former selves, certain family formulæ or old home sayings would in an instant remove all doubts of identity. And Harry told how a friend of his, in the trenches of the Crimea, hearing close beside him the old 'Dulce domum' sung as only it is sung in Winchester cloisters, caught up the air and words as establishing instant kinship, and exclaiming, 'A Wykehamite!' then and there claimed friendship and brotherhood with his comrade.

Which led to the humming of scraps of song, and to the quotation of family sayings ; and,

finally, to my announcement of my willingness to edit a collection of home and Copsley-born proverbs, their histories being duly appended.

Editorship falls naturally to the one inactive member of the family ; who has, nevertheless, in this instance, failed to enlist all the contributions solicited. But for the unexpected reinforcement in Mary's handwriting, and for Master Clarke's opportune confidences to Mr. Merton, our project would have had but small results. As it is, Copsley folk may detect each other, wheresoever scattered, by forms of proverbial philosophy set forth in the pages here following ; and Janie shall one day claim, in her turn, a right and title to be initiated into these annals of the house of Beverley.

Proverbs—even family proverbs, domestic household sayings, such as these—are petrifications into language of old histories, former customs, traditional philosophy ; and I am inclined to think that many a pleasant-sounding story and quaint volume of domestic lore might be brought forth among us, could but the fossil sayings of other homes be taken down from shelves marked *private*, and translated into narrative by those possessing the key to histories which they represent.

II.

Alice : her Story.

' HAVE YOU HEARD THE PROUD LADY'S DISTAFF ? '



ALICE: HER STORY.

'Have you heard the proud lady's distaff?'

MINE is such a childish, long-ago story, that I hardly like to tell it. But Harry will have it so; and Georgie says that it is one of our earliest home sayings, and belongs to our old beginning days at Copsley more than any other; so that I must recall it as well as I can.

And, indeed, it is not difficult for me to remember all the history of the night on which the household word was born that has ever since been a special joint-property of Harry's and mine. For

it seems to me that, of the many memorial engravings of life history that are stored up in our minds, those first proofs belonging to early childhood are often amongst the most durable and defined in Memory's portfolios, standing out in strong relief through all our days. I know, at least, that our early motherless years at this old Hall, with the various incidents of our coming here, are, even now, as freshly present to my mind as if they had only just taken place.

Harry was seven years old when our grandfather died, and I was just six ; and I have still before me the awe with which we drove up the old elm avenue to the place that was to be our home, and the wondering manner in which I compared it with the London house which we had hitherto occupied. For Georgie and little Mary, who were only three and four years of age, it was nothing but a change of play-grounds, in which they delighted ; but we, with our superfluity of years, were quite capable of gleaning from conversation among the nurses vague ideas of advancement in my father's prosperity connected with our accession to the dignities of Copsley Hall.

We had only just lost our grandfather, whose departure had, at the last, been very sudden ; and

but for the death of my only uncle in a foreign land, the London house aforesaid would probably have been our home for life. It must have been from a scant understanding of some such circumstances, and from an association with the flitting to our new abode of my father's previous hurried departure to the funeral, of our own black clothes, and of interjectional exclamations among the servants, to the effect that we must all come to it at last,—which, having first applied to the end of our journey, I suddenly found to contain a reference to the conclusion of life's longer pilgrimage—it must have been for these reasons, I think, that I experienced a solemnity beyond that of six years old as we passed through the gates, and rolled slowly along the avenue above mentioned.

The elms are such old friends now—for so many winters have been like picture-books for us with all their frosty traceries—for so many summers have been concert-chambers for our private band of feathered minstrels—on so many holidays have waved salutations with their long arms, and condescended to be scaled by the boys in spite of all their dignity—that I can hardly believe them to be the same which then stood out so darkly before my eyes as if, as constituted guardians of the place, it was their duty to frown for ever on intruders

among them, much more on children who could distantly venture to be naughty.

There was a black hatchment over the door, which I pointed out silently to Harry as we approached the house.

‘What do you think it is, Harry?’ I inquired.

‘It’s your poor gran’pa’s quarterings, Miss Alice,’ answered our nurse, who was addicted to the study of a stray volume of the Peerage, which had found its way before I can remember into our nursery, and was regarded by us all as an authorised picture-book, difficult, however, of comprehension. ‘It’s your poor gran’pa’s quarterings; hung up there after he was dead.’

The idea was vague to me, and from its mistiness partook of the alarming. Harry’s adaptation, however, of some stray notices which had dwelt upon his mind in connexion with our picture-chronicle of the Tower of London, gave a certain horrible and undefined shapeliness to my nurse’s statement, mysterious though it remained.

‘Dear me!’ he rejoined, with an appearance of having discovered something that he had been seeking to understand; ‘“hung, drawn, and quartered,” that’s it, I suppose: but why should they, I wonder, to our grandpapa?’

Nurse's reply, 'O, Master 'arry, what dreadful things you do say !' was drowned by the sound of the wheels on the gravel sweep ; and then our father came and lifted us gently out of the carriage, and asked us if we were cold, and brought us through a hall round which hung a number of grim-looking gentlemen and ladies, who seemed to me to be in league with the elms and with the oak-panels and with the great clock and with the strange footmen to frown down frisky children, and led us into the dining-room, and began to unfasten our cloaks.

I was a little shy amid the novel surroundings of Copsley Hall, and hardly at home even with my father then ; and it was not till he took us each on one knee, and kissed us, and told us that this was our new home, and that he hoped we should be happy children in it, that I ventured to chatter away like Harry, and to tell him about the pigs in the road which frightened the horses, and the holly-berries ripening for Christmas in the hedges, and of the catastrophe of Georgie's hat having fallen out of the carriage-window, and of the funny old turnpike-woman who had told Harry he was a Beverley, she knew by his eyes.

I often wondered why our father, who was so kind, should be so grave nevertheless ; and it

puzzled me again, that, when we had told him all these interesting circumstances, he should look into my eyes with so sad a face, and with the words, 'Little Alice has not the Beverley eyes,' and then should put me down from him and send us up to Nurse to have some dinner. Well, the old sad look is never on his face now!

We saw little of him in those first days of our Copsley life; and, indeed, he was so much engaged out of doors, and so busy during that long winter in looking after the tenantry and their families, that if it had not been for Mrs. Blackett, who had once been his own nurse, and who, since our mother's death, had completely managed the household, we should have been badly off. But Mrs. Blackett being there, we were not badly off. On the contrary, a course of homely education was interspersed with a plenary indulgence in respect of childish liberties, which might perhaps be considered by some supervisors of youth to have involved ruinous results in the future.

I do not say that our course of instruction was methodical. Far from it. Village-school children now-a-days are taught upon educational principles of far more dignified a character; and our instructress, herself, would have taken her spectacles off

and put them on frequently as an assistance in times of perplexity, had she been called upon to determine the standards to which, under a revised educational code, we might respectively have been classified.

But there was a certain charm in the medley of literature provided for us which bribed us on into the acquisition of learning. The best Book was no lesson-book in Mrs. Blackett's educational system, but was read to us, until we read for ourselves, as a frequent reward for successful struggles in learning, or for little efforts at 'being good,' which were encouraged by a promise of the narration of Jacob's dream or Joseph's life, or yet more, of sacred histories of One concerning Whom I will not now speak particularly. Our ordinary literature consisted of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, Foxe's *Martyrs* in one volume, an old History of England, Quarles' *Emblems*, with striking illustrations, a book of fairy stories, an abridgment of the *Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Mrs. Trimmer's Robin, Dicky, Flapsy, and Pecksy. To these were added, from time to time, stray volumes given to us at Christmas, or on other occasions, by my father; but it was not until, stealing one day into the long library, and climbing up on the steps to bring down a volume which 'looked nice,'

and which proved to be a many-pictured history of Rome, that I realised the discovery of a veritable new world, to which I was to be my own Columbus ; and deliberately abandoned Mrs. Blackett's out-works of literature for raids upon a fortress whereof the library-steps became the scaling-ladder, and which promised inexhaustible treasures to the finder.

It did not occur to our father to have a governess for us, and I think Mrs. Blackett did not wish it. Harry, we knew, would go to school when he grew older : but 'growing older' is a vague term, with an undefined boundary ; and to such, children attach little real meaning.

So we learnt our spelling in the morning, and said our hymns, and wrote in old-fashioned copy-books, and worked laboriously in our gardens with intentions of cultivating blackberries until they should attain an unprecedented luxuriance, and of obtaining plants from the gardener in reward for weedless flower-beds ; and we made friends with some of the old people in the village, and ran about the house as much as we liked, and went in every evening to dessert with our father, and, on the whole, were happy children, with many quiet pleasures, and some noisy ones upon which

the grim gentlemen and ladies in the hall seemed to me to look grimly still.

Harry was the noisy one of the four, which was all right. And he did not understand one feeling of mine which came to me every now and then, even at play. I did not like to tell any one but him, and I knew I might not say a word of it to papa ; but sometimes when I looked at the old pictures I used to wonder if those ladies had any little children once. And then I used to steal into the dining-room, where there was a portrait of a pretty lady with her arm round a little girl about my own age, and there used to be a great longing in my heart to be that little girl, and to have a mamma of my own as she had.

But all this is a long prelude to the story which I was to write concerning an adventure of ours which took place when we had been nearly two years at Copsley Hatch. Nearly two years, during which our lives had been unmarked by anything more exciting than a visit to Mrs. Adams at the Parsonage, or a return-visit from the Parsonage children to the Hall ; two years, during which the old house and the old elms and the old village people and the old pictures were books from which we gathered lessons not a few.

It was an evening at the end of the autumn—a long dark evening, closing in a short dark day ; and while Harry and I sat together discovering pictures in Mrs. Blackett's fire, I found myself wondering how the children whom I had seen at the village school spent their evenings—whether they sat by their fathers when they came home from work ; whether they nursed baby brothers and sisters ; above all, whether their mothers folded the clothes round them in bed, and kissed them, and heard them say their prayers.

Such thoughts always came to me when I was in any way troubled ; and on this night I was in pensive mood for more reasons than one. The chief was that Harry was getting tired of having only me for his companion, and I knew that he was right. I had almost begun to feel that it was half my fault that I was a girl, and could not have leaping matches and climb trees with him like Archie Adams. And then he had slipped into boasting ways rather, and was continually telling me of all that he would do when he went to school, and was not kept in leading-strings any longer. I always knew Harry was far more important than I was, and yet I could not bear to think that he would never miss me ; and it was in my heart to determine what a brave sister I

would be to him, and how much I would try to make him love me more, all the time that we were sitting together looking at the fire.

My father was out that night at a meeting of some of the country gentlemen, which took place in the neighbourhood ; so we did not go to the dining-room as usual, but were made comfortable, all four together, in Mrs. Blackett's own little parlour, where we had tea with her, and where we two remained when Georgie and Mary had been taken up to bed.

It was nearly our bed-time when the door was opened which led to the servants' hall ; and we caught the sound of a well-known voice which we were weekly accustomed to hear from the clerk's desk in our parish church.

'It's Master Clarke,' exclaimed Harry, jumping to his feet, and going into the passage : 'I've been to see him with Archie Adams, and he's telling them stories.'

I generally followed Harry's guidance ; and did so in this instance, although seldom allowed by Mrs. Blackett to be among the servants. The door of the hall was, however, half open, and we crept softly in behind a great chair in which Master Clarke was unquestionably at home, while

he held discourse with two or three of the maids, who listened with admiring attention. There was no light in the room but that of the wood fire, which produced quite a little series of effects amongst the old rafters of the ceiling, and which threw our quiet retreat into depths of shadow, wherein we gave secret audience to those without.

Master Clarke was evidently in the humour for discussion, and his auditors were equally in listening mood. 'Thirty years, come Easter, I've been clerk of this parish, not to mention having been born and brought up in the same for thirty years before,' he was saying as we entered ; 'born, christened, married, and in due course to be carried into the church of Copsley, for decent interment of the same,' he continued, with a half-unconscious relapse into professional form, and with a profound survey of that corner of the rafters whereupon the vivid flames in the chimney were producing flickering patterns of red light, reminding me of the fiery handwriting on the wall, concerning which Mrs. Blackett had related to us on Sunday night.

'La, Master Clarke,' interposed the housemaid, 'it gives one quite a turn to hear you go on so !'

Whether a consciousness of power to produce

that physical effect commonly designated as 'giving a turn' was not altogether displeasing to Master Clarke, or whether, having been launched upon a stream of ideas, along which his mind habitually plied, and upon which it was quite at home, he felt the subject on hand to be distinctively his element, I cannot say ; but so it was, that he pursued the line of thought already suggested for some minutes, repeating dismally, and in a tone which seemed to imply that he was an authority on such matters, if any one might claim to be such,—

‘ Under the water,
Under the yoke,
Under the ground :
To the font carried,
At the rail married,
And then—a mound.’

‘ Ah, there’s a deal in that ! a deal in that !’ he continued, looking into the fire as if for corroboration of the sentiment,—

‘ *To* the font carried,
At the rail married,
And then—a mound.’

‘ I declare, Master Clarke,’ interposed the

cook, who had sunk into an opposite chair, after sending the last course into the dining-room, 'you're as dismal as a ghost story to-night! Can't you say something to raise one's spirits, instead of setting up churchyard songs fit for a vault, not to say a family vault?' and her tone conveyed a distinct consciousness that there were vaults and vaults; and that songs might be appropriate to some which would clearly be inadmissible in the case of others of a first-class description.

Master Clarke nodded his appreciation of a nicety of distinction approaching to the professional. 'You're right, Mrs. Martin; as might be expected from one who has always lived in families, and not been, so to speak, anywheres in life;' and Mrs. Martin, who in her turn found her own professional distinctions recognised, and who ever prided herself that she *had* lived in families, and not anywhere, accepted the return implication with suavity, while I wondered how people could make their way out of families, and could achieve living nowhere.

'And yet,' continued her visitor, 'there's stories in families that's like the old plate, going with the name, and that sticks to the walls like the——'

‘Cobwebs,’ suggested the nursemaid, who had entered the circle from the further end of the room.

‘Damp,’ interposed the housemaid, with feeling.

‘That clings to the walls like the mould,’ continued Master Clarke, with decision, and with a solemn sense of the superior fitness of his choice of metaphor; ‘and that no one who takes a view of mortal things, I might say, in a comprehending sort of manner, even as in those words that I was a repeating of, can forget, being things beyond ordinary.’

‘You don’t mean to say there’s ghosts in the house!’ exclaimed Mrs. Martin, jumping rapidly at conclusions, and speaking in a tone which might have followed a suggestion of rats.

‘I never *said* nothing of the sort, Mrs. Martin,’ replied the clerk of Copsley, ‘although Beverleys has as good a right to them as the highest in the land, and can show monuments with Latin on them as old as the days of Papists and crosses and pilgrimages to Jerusalem: but I never said the other way, and never dare, with the picture of the proud lady telling another story in the oak hall.’

If Master Clarke had been working up to this point with the desire to awaken female

curiosity to its utmost limits, he could not have been more successful. Mrs. Martin, indeed, refrained from committing herself to its too open manifestation, and contented herself with observing that if those girls' heads got filled with such nonsense, they'd be more trouble to keep going after dark than ever; while she, nevertheless, settled herself conclusively in her large chair, as a recognised auditor of what might follow. 'The girls,' meantime, thus adverted to, unhesitatingly demanded the recital of the history connected with the picture; the housemaid throwing at the same time a new log of wood on the fire, which set the flame-spirits dancing afresh among the rafters, and deepened the shadow behind the huge chair which concealed us from observation.

'Not that it's a ghost story,' continued the clerk, after a minute's meditation; 'though it would be against my duty, holding a position in the church, to say I didn't believe in such; and I'd never be the man to give in on such a subject:—not that it's a ghost story, although there's no denying it's not far off—not far off,' he repeated, musingly.

I crept a little nearer to Harry at this point in our stolen audience, half fearful lest we should

be on the brink of disclosures which might involve a perpetual after-terror; but Harry would not let me come up close to him, almost receding from me, lest I should imagine that he, for a moment, shared my weakness. It was only an inch or so that he drew back from me; but it was enough to recall my thoughts of half-an-hour before, and to make me think how brave he was, and what a foolish, babyish sister I must appear to him. And yet, I should not have thought him less manly if he had put his arm round me, as we sat there together; and I should have felt so happy.

These thoughts were so in my mind that I hardly noticed what Master Clarke said at the beginning of his story, only observing that he changed his voice to a very solemn and impressive tone, which caused the nursery-maid to exclaim that she was beginning to feel she didn't know how.

'It's the portrait at the corner of the hall,' he was saying, when I resumed my attention; 'at the south corner, by the entrance to the old drawing-room wing. She's a fine lady to see, with grand features, and the sort of nose that runs in high families; but it's her eyes that have the steel look in them, and a bad glitter even in the picture,

which would frighten away any child that was pure and good.'

'There's a good deal in eyes,' soliloquised Mr. Clarke. 'There's eyes, now, that sets a face all on fire, and carries everything before them; and there's others that's tender and soft, for all the world like little Missie's upstairs; although, when one thinks justly of such things,' he continued, throwing in a serious reflection as became his calling, 'it comes to the same when they're closed at last, like blinds down in the windows to say there's death inside—it doesn't matter then, so that they were good and true before.'

I was quite ashamed at hearing myself spoken of; and, for the first time, felt that we were guilty in listening to conversation not intended for our ears. I whispered to Harry that we should come out from our hiding-place, but he frowned dissent; so that I remained in concealment, not a little disturbed, however, by the fear of what might be coming further.

'It was nigh upon three hundred years ago that the cruel lady came to this Hall. There had been one before her—the Squire's first wife, a young, beautiful bride. And she had died the mother's death when the heir was born. There

was to have been rejoicings round all the neighbourhood if the child had been a boy—so, at least, the story goes; but all the merry-makings were reversed, or went into mourning; and the Squire seemed to be too much beside himself with grief to care for the baby that reminded him of its dead mother. After a time he went away to the wars, leaving the child with a good foster-nurse; and nothing was heard of him for three years or more. One day, word was brought that he was coming back with a new lady, and everything was to be in readiness. The church bells were set ringing; but folks say that, although they had been in full tune the Sunday before, they sounded harsh and discordant that time, and that the peal has never been the same since.

‘It was plain to see there was little love between the Squire and his lady, though he gave her all she wanted, and that was more than many a duchess. She was a tall, dark dame; and held her head above the world, and would have the poor stand by to let her go past, never casting a glance on the place where the bride before her was laid. None knew where she came from, but folks said she had Spanish blood in her veins, and was a Papist; and that her father

had saved the Squire's life in battle, and had made him take his daughter. There wasn't need, however, to ask what was her religion, for she had none that any one knew of; and thought the church where the Beverleys had worshipped for so long only fit for the village-folk, whom she would not have touched with the skirts of her dress. They said, however, that she had some knowledge more than was good for man or woman; and every one was afraid of having the proud lady for an enemy.

'The boy that had been left to his foster-nurse was a delicate, frail thing. He was the child of the village that had a place in every woman's heart, and was held in reverence for his dead mother's sake. They said that he would steal out in the summer afternoons to the place in the church where she had been laid; and that one day he was found sleeping beside her monument, and among the old Beverleys, who seem to have been frozen into stone while they were saying their prayers. A little lonely child for the big house, but as good as her that was gone; and on Sundays his voice was heard amongst the singers from the side of his foster-nurse, and everybody said that it was something

strange in the boy that gave it a sound angel-like and different from other children.

‘ One day, soon after the proud lady’s arrival, the good nurse went weeping through the village, saying that she was turned away from her darling, and would never see him any more; and stories began to spread of his wandering forlorn about the great house, with never so much as a thought given to him but thoughts of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.’

Here Master Clarke paused, satisfied with the winding up of his final period; and apparently with the desire of arranging the form of the narrative which was to follow, and in which he forsook the grammatical carelessness habitual to his ordinary speech, adopting a histrionic style which belonged to the recital of his favourite tradition, and which contributed, in no small degree, to make an impression on his audience.

‘ About that time, it began to be said that, because she had no child of her own, the proud lady took a hatred to the solitary one that was the heir; and that she would stare and glitter at him with those terrible eyes of hers until he seemed to wither at the sight of her. She never spoke to him from day to day, only hated him

constantly; so that he would more than ever seek a shelter in the church, which was left open until nightfall, seeming to find a sort of protection among the old dead-and-gone squires and dames, where they knelt and lay as they do to this day.'

The housemaid's aside, to the effect that really Master Clarke was almost like poetry, even more than Mrs. Martin's ejaculation,—'Bless its little heart! I wish I had been there!' encouraged the narrator as he went on:—

'In the old red drawing-room, which isn't used now—there being no lady, which more's the pity—she would sit and spin with her distaff. They said it wasn't like that of other women, but that it had a sound quite different, and that it was made curiously in foreign parts, and was swifter and finer in its workmanship than was ever known in the country before. There were other things whispered about it, too, to which I myself don't, as a public character, give full credit; for I don't believe in such things as charmed spinning-wheels, lent for a time, so to speak, by them below of whom one mustn't talk too freely.

'It was on the day five years after the first wife died that the proud lady took to her

distaff, and that the little heir, wandering forlorn about the house, came upon her in the red drawing-room where she sat.

“For whom are you spinning the white cloth?” he said, wondering.

‘And then she turned upon him with those eyes of hers that had the poison in them, and said,—“It’s the face-cloth that’ll cover you in the coffin.”

‘And day by day she went on spinning, the Squire being most times from home; and day by day the child came and stood beside her, asking the same question. And after a time she said,—“It’s the shroud that’s to fold you in your coffin.” And, last of all, when her work was done, she looked round full upon him and said,—“It’s the winding-sheet to wrap you round in your coffin.” That was at nine o’clock on a summer’s morning; and at nine o’clock that night, when search was made by the servants for the heir of Copsley Hall, he was found quite dead by his mother’s tomb, and was laid in the same grave with her by faithful hands that would let nothing of the bad lady’s handicraft touch the innocent child who nestled again then in her arms who bare him.

‘Then, after he died, a terrible mood came over the proud mistress of the Hall; and she grew darker and wilder, and would sit muttering to herself, and spinning for hours and hours, in the red drawing-room where she had been as good as a murderess. And when they tried to get her away from the place, she would refuse to leave it, saying,—“It’s to wrap you round when you lie in your coffin.” She went quite mad at last, sometimes moaning and sometimes raving, and constantly weaving that long web of hers at the distaff. And when she died, they wrapped her in the winding-sheet that had been worked with her own hands for the motherless boy whom she had hated for his innocence and for his birth-right.

‘It’s said,’ concluded the narrator, lowering his voice to a tone which was more impressive than anything that had preceded it, ‘that if any one has a bad deed on his conscience that has been done, or that if any one’s about doing something wicked, they may hear the sound of the proud lady’s distaff at nine o’clock at night, if they choose to go into the red drawing-room and listen for it.’

A silence of some moments followed the conclusion of Master Clarke’s story; and I felt my

heart beating loudly, with an indescribable feeling of disquietude.

And then the nursery-maid, who had said she felt she didn't know how, observed that she knew what she felt, and that was creeping all over. My sympathies were with her; for, though the expression was vague, it described my own sensations with some exactness; while my mind was full of the forlorn heir of the house of Beverley, and I felt a longing desire to have had him for a little brother, that I might have loved and comforted him.

What was my surprise to hear Harry's voice a moment after, as, jumping up from his place of concealment, he said aloud,—‘I don't believe a word of all the story, Master Clarke; and I don't think the sounds *are* really heard, that it says, at nine o'clock.’

‘Why, wherever have you come from, Master 'arry!’ was the exclamation from each member of the fire-side group. ‘I declare if you haven't taken our breath away, jumping out upon us in such a fashion!’

‘Why, we've been listening for ever so long behind Master Clarke's chair,’ was Harry's immediate response; while I, with more shamefacedness,

disclosed my presence : 'and though it's a very fine story,' he repeated, 'I don't think it's a bit true.'

'It's easy *saying* so, Master Harry !' replied the parish functionary ; 'it's easy *saying* so !' and his voice implied that he would be glad to think it could be disproved, while the maids shook their heads at each other, and exclaimed in a soft chorus that 'It was, indeed.'

'It's a serious matter, not believing them family stories,' continued Master Clarke, with some solemnity ; 'and you a Beverley, sir !'

'You'll be saying you don't believe in St. George and the Dragon next !' interposed Mrs. Martin, roused in a measure by a vague sense of family dignity attaching to a tradition of the house.

'Nor in the Seven Champions of Christendom—nor in Alfred and St. Dunstan—nor in Daniel in the lions' den !' chimed in the housemaid, with a hurried raid on her memory, which, by reason of the suddenness of the demand, furnished its stores somewhat promiscuously.

Harry paused for a moment, unprepared for the consequences which were laid before him as the ultimate result of scepticism in the matter of

the proud lady ; and the entry of Mrs. Blackett in full search after her missing charges put an end to the debate.

But the story of the lonely little child, wandering over the same rooms and through the same passages in which we played together, dwelt on my mind that night, and would have been in my dreams, even though I had not heard the housemaid exclaiming outside our nursery that Betsy should come and sleep with her, for Master Clarke's stories had taken hold of her to that extent she couldn't abide sleeping alone. And in the morning, after breakfast, I found myself standing before the portrait of the proud lady, and trying to fancy what she looked like when the hissing words fell from her lips on the ear of the friendless child who bore our own name. And I noticed the cruel glitter of the eyes upon which Master Clarke had observed so critically ; and almost imagined that they were fixed on me with scorn and dislike, because I knew now the terrible history of her life.

Harry came to my side after a while ; and then I forgot everything but the prospect of our having a morning together, if only he would play with me, and would be kind enough not to mind my being a girl.

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‘Such humbug of Master Clarke’s!’ he observed, looking up at the picture. ‘I dare say, however, you believe it, Alice : girls believe anything.’

I hardly knew what to say ; for, though I did not quite give credence to all that had been narrated by the chronicler of the night before, I yet found it impossible to disassociate the legend from the portrait before our eyes.

‘It’s a very sad story,’ I said, soberly ; ‘but, Harry, you don’t think it can be true about the sound of the distaff ?’

‘There you are !’ he replied : ‘I knew you believed it all. Come into the red drawing-room and look for the distaff, and listen for the sound yourself.’

‘But,’ I replied, timidly, ‘it’s at nine o’clock at night that it’s heard ; and then it’s only by those who have something bad on their minds.’

‘And you never have, I suppose,’ replied Harry. ‘Who was it that left the cage open when the canary escaped, and that let Fido fall over the banisters, and that turned the cock in the greenhouse and forgot to close it, so that the ground was flooded, and that burnt a hole in her pinafore by standing near the bars, and that knocked down papa’s gun, which went off, and

might have killed somebody, only that there wasn't any one in the way to be killed?'

It made me very sorrowful to think of the inventory of evil deeds that Harry remembered against me; and although I thought of things that he had done, which at the time had seemed worse than these, and felt a temptation to reply with reminders of them, the sense of my own transgressions prevented my having the spirit to do so.

'I'll tell you what,' continued Harry, 'come with me to night at nine o'clock, and listen for the proud lady. Nobody 'll hear us go down there.'

I must confess to having quaked a little at the proposition; but I would not appear afraid, and so contented myself with replying,—'But, Harry, we are put to bed at eight.'

'Well, what of that?' was the reply; 'can't you get up again?'

'But Mrs. Blackett wouldn't like us to.'

'She never said you mustn't. It's very easy getting out of it by saying she wouldn't let you.'

'But it would be dark!'

'Just like a girl! afraid of the dark! Why, it's bright moonlight now; all the passages are light enough for any one.'

'Do you want me to come, Harry?'

‘O, don’t come for me, if you’re afraid,’ was his reply; ‘though, of course, I’d rather you came too.’

That last part of his speech quite settled my adhesion to Harry’s plot. Mrs. Blackett, nurse, the proud lady, the darkness, the inconvenience of getting up after having been formally inaugurated into bed by our motherly guardian herself, all gave way to the burning desire to be true to him, my own brother, of whom I wanted to prove myself worthy. The thought came into my mind that he should see how I would trust him, and follow him, and be brave like him; and as I looked back, I thought how nobly he had told them all the night before that he didn’t believe in the proud lady, and how foolish my fears in the matter must appear to him.

‘I’ll come with you anywhere, Harry,’ I replied; ‘but shan’t we go into the red drawing-room first by daylight, and get to feel comfortable in it now?’ And then my heart palpitated with pleasure as he pronounced mine a very good suggestion, and as, hand in hand, we went along the dark oak passage which led away from the rooms in ordinary family use to the great room which was hardly ever opened.

The door was a-jar, for the housemaid had been

there that morning; and I wondered how she felt among all the grand furniture that was so closely covered up, and that Mrs. Blackett said was so old and costly; and I half determined to ask her whether she had ever been there herself exactly at nine o'clock.

The shutters were closed, but after many efforts, Harry managed to unbar them, and to let some light into the great unfamiliar room: and then we looked round, and were beginning to explore the apartment, when a distant sound of our father's voice, calling us, cut short our investigations; and, leaving the heavy door still slightly a-jar, we ran to meet him on his return, and to accompany him through the park, and to wish him good-bye at the gates, where he left us, going off to a village at some distance.

The day seemed to pass very slowly. Harry was less anxious than I about the evening's enterprise, although he was the leader in it; while I almost felt like a criminal when Mrs. Blackett praised my needle-work, and told me that papa should see how neatly his cravat was hemmed, and that she would ask him to provide me with a new work-box, suitable for a young lady, with everything in it that could be useful for me. I longed

to jump on her lap, and to tell her that we were to be out of bed and in the red drawing-room at nine o'clock that night. But I was to prove myself loyal to my brother, and my lips were sealed.

It turned out a wet afternoon; and a secret sense of desolation while Harry was away at the Parsonage made me very sober as I played with Georgie and Mary, and then set to work under nurse's guidance at making sails for the ship which he and Archie Adams were constructing to swim on the lake. And when it became too dark to go on with the work, I ran out of the nursery, and descending the sweeping staircase, made my way to the dining-room, and, seating myself on the hearth-rug, looked up into the soft eyes of the lady who was, I settled, like my own mother; and there was found asleep when they came to prepare for our father's dinner.

We were not to go in to dessert that night, Mrs. Blackett said; for some gentlemen were coming to talk over county business with him, and they must not be disturbed. So she brought us down to her own parlour; and I will not deny that perquisites in the form of jelly, and what she called 'loose change' from sundry compounds which came forth out of the dining-room, made their way in

our direction ; after which Harry amused himself by trying on the hats and outer garments of the gentlemen, whose voices sounded distantly in our ears as we played in the hall.

It was nearly eight o'clock when we were sent to bed. Mrs. Blackett kissed us downstairs, and called us her chickens, and told us to go up quietly, for that she would have to send in the coffee, and could not tuck us into bed herself that night, according to custom. And then I heard her say to the cook that there was a sort of comfort in sending up the large salver again, though it brought her poor lady to her mind more than ever, since there hadn't been company in the house from her time to the present.

So upstairs we went—Harry, three steps at a time—and were desired to tread softly lest we should disturb the little ones. It gave me such a sense of the dignity of my age to look at them when they were asleep, and to think that I was two whole years older than Georgie ! And that night I almost envied them as they lay in their little cribs side by side—Georgie, so pale and delicate, and little Mary with her curls over the pillow ; and I thought how much better they were than I, who was going to get up in the night

at what seemed to me a very advanced hour indeed. I was sorely tempted to give up my intention of going with Harry; but then, what would he say? And what an unworthy sister I should prove myself to one so brave and clever as he was!

‘What’s over Miss Alice?’ asked the nurse, not addressing any one in particular, but speaking generally; ‘she’s looking quite mopish to-night.’

‘She’s put out at not going in to her pa to dessert,’ replied Betsy, volunteering information upon the subject. ‘Such an handsome dessert, too! When one sees preserved ginger like that going in, it makes one feel there’s something in riches.’

Meantime, preparations for bed were advancing rapidly. Harry was more expeditious in his proceedings than I was, even with nurse’s aid; and from within the open door of his little room, which joined ours, shouted an unusual ‘Good night, Alice!’ which made me feel more guilty than ever.

After a little while, when the quarter-past eight had sounded out from the church tower, and when nurse had gone through the process of tucking in for all four, and when the customary ‘Go to sleep, like good children,’ had announced that her responsibilities concerning us were over for that day at all events, the light

was put out, and the old-fashioned rushlight lit which Mrs. Blackett insisted upon, lest we should learn to be frightened in the dark, and both our attendants disappeared at the sound of the supper-bell to the far-off regions downstairs.

I did not like to speak to Harry at first; and, moreover, I was afraid of disturbing Georgie and Mary, who had little snowy cots at the other end of our spacious nursery. So I lay there quite still; and listened to the wind which was rising in the woods, and which every now and then broke out in a dismal wail that echoed among the rafters, and shook the windows, as if trying to force its way in and give us a little of its mind about our intentions. And then I looked at the rushlight, or, rather, upon the shadow patterns which its tall perforated sides produced on the wall; and it seemed to me that the light was imprisoned in a fortress, and wanted to get out, and couldn't; and then I gradually began to find that I, and not the light, was in the fortress; and then that the red drawing-room, and not a fortress, was the place of my imprisonment, when something pulling the bed-clothes startled me out of my inaugural slumber, and I jumped up in bed to find Harry by my side, saying,—

‘Can’t you wake up, Alice?’

I could not remember all at once why he was there. Then I saw that he had no shoes on, only his stockings; and that his costume was a combination of various orders of architecture, the white frill of his night-gown representing that of bed-time, and peeping out from beneath his little flannel cricketing jacket in an entirely novel manner.

‘Must we go now, Harry?’ I asked, rather faint-heartedly: ‘I’m so sleepy!’

‘*You* needn’t,’ was his reply; ‘I shall, however, and tell old Clarke and all the rest of them that he’s a humbug.’

It seemed to me that we were taking a great deal of trouble to bring Master Clarke to that state of conviction; and for a moment I could not see the importance of the object that was to be attained. The possibility of being let off, and of sinking down into my nest again to sleep, was so delightful to me, that I could not resist saying,—

‘Would you mind my not going *very* much, Harry? it’s so late!’

But I repented my tremblings of heart with as much compunction as he could possibly have ‘red when he replied,—

‘I thought so! When it comes to it you’re just like any other girl. I see you don’t mind my going all alone.’

‘When it comes to it!’ I could not help feeling now that something was really to be come to; and that I had proved myself unworthy of Harry in wavering for a moment in my allegiance to him.

‘O Harry!’ I exclaimed, ‘you shan’t go down alone;’ and, summoning up all my courage, I put on my stockings and the little red flannel dressing-gown that Mrs. Blackett, whom I now remembered with a pang had herself made for me, and plunging after Harry into the dark oak passage, with much the same sensation as if from a bathing-machine into the sea, followed him cautiously, after gently closing the nursery-door on the little ones within.

Everything was perfectly still. The double doors of the dining-room were shut, and no sounds proceeded thence. The lamp was flickering faintly in the great hall, and lit up the cruel eyes of the proud lady in the picture, which seemed to gleam wickedly on the two noiseless children who were creeping by night to pry into her secrets. I was afraid Harry would think I was frightened if I put my hand in

his, or kept close up to him; and so I took hold of the banisters as we stole down the broad staircase, and wished I were brave like him. And then there came over me a sense of the lateness of the hour—an hour of the darkness with which I was almost unacquainted, and which it seemed to me I was invading in such unauthorised manner as to be intruding upon mysteries of the night not intended for children's penetration. Our familiarity with the small hours of night registers our advance in life; and in those days nine o'clock and we were strangers to each other, and I feared making its acquaintance by stealth.

Following the long passage which swept nearly round the house, and which I knew was leading us further and further from its inhabited regions, we made our way towards the red drawing-room. The door was still a-jar as we had left it; and struggling moonbeams, stealing through the window from which Harry had in the morning unbarred the shutter, shed a fitful and ghostly light over all things within. He went in first, I following; and then, as he pushed the door behind me, it closed with a dull, heavy bang, which sounded in my ears like a knell as regarded any hope of retreat from our purpose.

Then we looked all round as well as we could in the wide room, and, in spite of every effort to keep up courage, I felt my heart failing me. For in the dim uncertain light, things of common use took for me strange and terrible forms. The long sofas, covered up in their swathings of linen, appeared to me like the great sarcophagi that I had seen in the British Museum, and which, I had been told, contained the mummy forms of dead Egyptians, whom I had tried to fancy rising up again in so strange a place; and I hardly ventured to look at them. And then the chairs and tables stood before me like gaunt skeletons of ichthyosauri and other unfamiliar animals; their legs, only, emerging from the brown holland which gave them so unshapely a form. The very mirrors and chandeliers were muffled up as if in perpetual disgrace, and with their pinafores turned over their faces; and I could not divest my mind of the idea that everything around us was conscious, and knew what we were about.

‘Shall we have long to wait, Harry?’ I asked, timidly; ‘it seems so cold here.’

‘It was past the three-quarters when we came down,’ said Harry; ‘it would be no good to go back before nine, without staying to listen.’

To listen for what? My heart was failing, and my courage falling lower and lower. If there *should* be anything in it! It might be. Master Clarke was, in my eyes, very old, and had lived all his life in the place. He would have said that the story was not true if he thought so. Suppose that the cruel lady of Beverley should really have a fancy for haunting the place with her distaff; and suppose—oh, suppose we were to hear it! I was only eight; and eight years old is credulous and not always logical in argument.

‘Harry,’ I said in a whisper, ‘are you afraid?—I mean just a little bit, like a boy might be, you know.’

‘Do you think I’d have come down here if I was?’ he replied.

‘It’s very brave of you, I know,’ I answered, somewhat falteringly; ‘and, of course, I don’t think that it’s true: but suppose that—that——’

‘Suppose what?’

‘Why that she—I meant that Master Clarke was right, and that——’

‘In any case,’ replied Harry, ‘it’s only if any one’s got something wrong on his mind that it’s heard; and I believe still that old Clarke was hum-bugging the maids, and I told him so.’

I thought again how noble Harry was to be willing to prove the matter so fearlessly, by coming down himself to the place of traditionally doubtful repute; but then, of course, he had nothing on his mind to make him uneasy. I, meantime, thought of the nursery upstairs as of a far-off haven from which I had cut myself off long ago, and wondered what they were doing there, and what was going on in the house, as some distant wanderer from home might picture to himself the doings in that home, sensible of being hopelessly separated thence.

‘Let us go to the window,’ said Harry; and pushing aside more of the shutter we looked out upon a portion of the grounds which we but seldom frequented. Our flower-garden of now-a-days was then a sufficiently dreary tract of uneven turf, bounded by the eastern portion of the churchyard; and the tombstones, emerging from the rank grass, showed coldly and stonily in the moonlight. I could not help shivering. Harry seemed to me to be trying how daring he could be—actually drumming on the window-panes with his fingers—when solemnly from the church-tower chimed forth the hour of nine, each note dying away in the distance as its announcement

was taken up and repeated by the succeeding one.

We were quite still for a moment, and then Harry, betraying a readiness to be released from our vigil, which was the only symptom of his having been ill at ease that he allowed himself to exhibit, had exclaimed, 'Come along, Alice; you see I was right!' when distinctly on our ears fell a whirring sound, abrupt, and, to our thinking, quite unlike anything we had ever heard before, which brought my heart to my mouth and caused it almost to stop beating. It seemed to come from beneath our feet, and to fill the whole room while it lasted; but after a quarter of a minute or less the sound ceased, and we for an instant were silent.

I was the first to speak. 'Harry,' I whispered, 'did you ever hear anything like that before?'

'No, I don't think I ever did,' he replied, with a quiver of uneasiness in his voice. 'Look here, Alice; don't you ever tell any one as long as you live about our coming down here; and we'll just get up to bed again before the servants come upstairs from supper.'

My heart bounded with mingled hope and fear as he almost ran to the door, followed closely by me. The very fact of motion seemed to in-

crease my desire for a precipitate retreat. I did not share Harry's fear of discovery; or rather, it was swallowed up in the greater superstitious fear that once more clothed with a sort of living terror all the inanimate forms in the haunted drawing-room. No more welcome sight could have presented itself to my eyes than Mrs. Blackett's comely form, had she at that instant appeared before us; and there would have been a reality and ordinary life effect in any admonition from her lips which would have converted it at that moment into music for my ears.

Harry's hand was on the old-fashioned handle of the door which he had so determinately shut when we entered the room, and he hurriedly turned it round. Yes—that was the climax—turned it round and round without meeting a particle of resistance from the lock—without being a bit nearer opening it than at first.

'Pull, Harry!' I whispered. But he pulled in vain.

'Push, Harry!' I suggested, wildly. 'Oh, push—*do* push!' But it was of no use.

'O Harry!' I faltered out, 'I heard Mrs. Blackett tell Jane to be sure and take care not to shut herself into the drawing-room, as the lock wouldn't

turn on the inside, and must be mended. I didn't know she meant this drawing-room.'

'Then we're shut in here for to-night,' gasped Harry, half in anger, half in terror. 'Alice, it's all your doing. Why didn't you tell me before I shut the door?'

'O Harry, Harry! come and sit down by me on the floor,' I said, tremblingly; 'come and keep me warm, Harry: I'm so cold.'

He came and sat down, but I knew he didn't love me just then. And after a minute he said—quite like a judge, I thought,—'Alice, what have you been doing wrong? It'll make it better to confess; and Master Clarke may have been right, and it's a judgment.'

I was crying with cold and fear, and Harry's displeasure. I thought that perhaps we might never be found again; and that we might die here like the babes in the wood, only that we were not babes, and were not exactly in a wood. And then a sort of vision came to my mind of papa and Mrs. Blackett mourning over us, and finding us after weeks and months, like the bride of the mistletoe bough of whom Betsy sang to us, a picture which Harry's stern voice did not dissipate at once. He spoke again after a minute, when I did not answer,—

‘Tell me, Alice, what you’ve been doing wrong. It may be for that. Try and think directly.’

‘I can’t think; oh, I can’t think, Harry,’ I replied, fearfully, ‘except coming down here: indeed, indeed I can’t remember.’

‘You had better try,’ said Harry, moodily; ‘I shouldn’t wonder if we heard the pr——, the sound again, if you don’t.’

I was half frantic at the suggestion. ‘Yes, Harry, I remember one thing,’ I said, desperately; ‘it was last Sunday, and I went to sleep in church. You know it *was* a long sermon—yards long,’ I continued, adopting hastily the wrong table of measures. ‘Papa wasn’t angry, though, and put his arm round me; but Mrs. Blackett says we mustn’t go to sleep in church.’

‘It’s that, perhaps, Alice,’ said Harry, solemnly. ‘I’m sure it was very wrong. Some one once went to sleep in church and fell down dead. O Alice! to think of your doing so!’

My heart misgave me. I might have done many things as bad as that, for which Harry was being punished as well as me. I tried to think of them all. ‘Don’t be angry, Harry; and oh do—*do* forgive me!’ I cried; ‘but I remember now tying Mrs. Blackett’s spectacles on Fido’s nose, and she

couldn't find them for a long time, and then saw him running about with them on : perhaps that was wrong. And then yesterday—no, last week—I gave a whole loaf from the dining-room table to a poor man, and papa said I oughtn't to have done it without first asking leave : was that very bad ? And—and—no, I can't remember anything else.'

'It's worse and worse, Alice !' said Harry, who seemed, I thought, to be trying to make me out wicked. 'Why, it was papa's bread, not yours. You gave away what was his—that was stealing. Alice ! I don't wonder at the sound coming, if—if it's at all true what they say.'

I was too frightened and conscience-stricken to defend myself; and leant my head against the nearest chair, which, fortunately, looked like a chair of earthly mould, and became a sort of friendly support in my terror.

Harry, meantime, strained and pulled at the door with as little success as ever. Round and round went the handle as harmlessly as possible, and without the smallest result.

'Shout, Harry !' I suggested ; and he was preparing to follow my suggestion, when, once more, sharply, clearly, and without the least indecision, sounded the whirr-rr-rr-rrr, which must, we thought,

be precisely the noise of a spinning-wheel. Harry's shout died before its birth, and he leant perfectly silent against the door. Then, after a minute, when all was still again, with a great deal of swallowing he began in a low voice to speak to me gently, and as if I were quite a boy like him.

'Alice, perhaps Master Clarke *is* right, and it's true about the proud lady; and, O Alice! it's not for you, it's for me, that sound has come. You don't know—papa doesn't—Mrs. Blackett doesn't—nurse doesn't—Mr. Adams doesn't—but I've been dreadfully wicked lately! I've been unkind to you, and made you feel as if I was better than you; and I was bad all the time. Papa told me never to go out with those boys of Mr. Lee's, and I've been out with them ever so often when you thought I was with Archie Adams; and they lent me a gun, and papa told me never to use a gun without his leave and his showing me how; and we shot once on papa's grounds, and they killed a pheasant; and, if it hadn't been that the gamekeeper's ill, we should all have been found out and taken up. And papa told me never, as long as I lived, to play for money, and I played with them—they taught me—and lost my half-crown. And then they laughed at me for being always with you; and I said I didn't care for girls,

and that I didn't want to go with you any more—though I loved you always ever so much, and think you're very nice indeed, Alice; but I tried to be manly to you because you were a girl. And O Alice, I made a name for Mrs. Blackett, when they said I was tied to her apron-strings—I made it myself, and called her an old Pollyfemus! Do you think it sounds bad, Alice?' he inquired, anxiously.

'Yes, Harry,' I replied; 'I think it sounds very dreadful! but if you tell her, I dare say she'll forgive you. And O Harry darling! put your arms round me, for I love you so much. And now you'll forgive me for—I mean, you'll not mind my being a girl, and I don't feel nearly so frightened now; and perhaps the proud lady won't sound her distaff any more—is a distaff like a rattle, Harry?—perhaps she won't any more, now you've told it all, and are going to tell it to papa. Tell me, are you very *very* frightened, Harry? I am; and I'm so cold; and I'm afraid no one will know where we are, and perhaps we shall be starved to death.' And at this prospect I gave way completely, while the sarcophagi and the unshapely forms all round me looked ghastlier and ghostlier than before.

'It's like Christian and Hopeful in Giant Despair's castle,' murmured Harry, giving himself, I

thought, too good a character ; ‘ but we haven’t a key.’

A bright thought flashed into my mind, after a few minutes of misery and terror which I could not conquer. ‘ The bell ! the bell, Harry ! There may be a bell by the chimneypiece. Let us try.’

We jumped up together, and, almost in a moment, a distant sound of a bell ringing in successive peals responded to Harry’s onslaught upon the bell-rope. He pulled without the slightest intermission, and with a vigour which might well be regarded as the index of his fears ; while, at each fresh peal, the measure of my hopes rose higher.

At the instant that a fresh repetition of the ominous sounds which were so connected with our misdoings, fell on our ears, the distant echo of footsteps in the oak-passage filled us with expectation. The door was opened without, and a procession headed by our father, and consisting of two or three gentlemen, followed promiscuously by two footmen, Mrs. Blackett, nurse, Mrs. Martin, and one or two other maids, entered the red drawing-room, all with lights in their hands. Not till then did it occur to me that my costume, not to say Harry’s, was out of order for other than nursery eyes. But all sense of fear was lost in a moment,

as papa put down his candle, and lifted me in his arms so that I could nestle my face into his bosom, while he exclaimed, 'Alice! my little Alice! so cold and frightened! What *is* the matter?'

I hardly listened to the chorus of exclamations which followed—to the strange gentlemen who said something about a sensation-scene—or to Mrs. Blackett, who exclaimed, 'To think of it! and in that dressing-gown, too, which I made for her myself!'—or to nurse, who said she should never be the same woman again as before that moment in which she found our beds empty, and the children gone, like flown antelopes; at which mixed metaphor Mrs. Martin nodded complacently, adding that she, likewise, might be regarded as having lost her identity from the sounding of the bell downstairs, which had never been rung before by mortal hands since she had been in the house, leaving it to be inferred that she could not answer for any others. To all these I gave little heed, as I listened to Harry speaking out bravely before the whole assembly.

'Papa,' he said, 'I got Alice to come down here with me after we were in bed. She didn't want to, but she came for my sake. Master Clarke said the proud lady's distaff sounded exactly at nine

o'clock, and I wanted to come and listen. And—and—I'm afraid, papa, I've been very wicked—for it *did* sound, and I'll tell you all to-morrow.'

Our father, to whom all this was very mysterious, looked round with astonishment on the maids, who filled up the door and passage, exclaiming in a sort of chorus following on Harry's recitative,—'To think of it!' 'And such children, too!' 'And what will Master Clarke say?' While the nursemaid, drawing rapid deductions, and arriving at general principles from the facts before her, murmured tremulously,—'Then it's all true! and there *is* haunted houses, and ghosts, and winding-sheets in candles, and Arabian Nights, and Blue Beards!' at which point Mrs. Blackett brought the catalogue to a close with the practical direction that she should go up to the nursery-fire and see that it was burning, in which expedition the housemaid charitably accompanied her, as it was manifestly impossible that she should go through the hall unsupported and alone.

'How is it that these children have had nonsense like this put into their heads?' inquired my father, addressing nobody in particular, but holding me quite closely in his arms.

'It wasn't anyone's fault but mine,' said Harry

again, who seemed to me to be atoning for every past misdemeanour by an absolute recklessness in the matter of confession, and who, in the terrible red drawing-room, seemed under the necessity of making his disclosures as rapidly as possible! 'it wasn't anyone else's fault—not Alice's, nor Mrs. Blackett's, nor Mrs. Martin's, nor nurse's, nor Jane's, nor Betsy's—' and here he paused for a moment, in the endeavour to recall any other member of the household to whom it might be an accommodation to be exculpated;—'it was I who made Alice listen to Master Clarke's story of the proud lady, where no one saw us; and *I'm afraid it's true, papa!*'

Our father looked now at Harry, who, having delivered this oration with his hand still on the bell-rope, presented an aspect remarkable, to say the least of it; and without any severe displeasure in his voice he suggested that we should go upstairs. 'You've been a pair of foolish children,' he said, fondly pressing me even closer than before; 'a pair of foolish children, and this little fluttering bird must be carried back to her nest.' And then, heading the torchlight procession, he carried me through the long passage, followed by Harry, who looked very small and funny in his night-gown and

cricketing-jacket and stocking-feet, as he passed by the pictures in the old hall and by the terrible portrait of the proud lady who had given us so much to think of, humbly accepting the hand of one of the strange gentlemen, who was very tall, and who, in his dinner-dress, looked an incongruous conductor for the conscience-stricken heir of Copsley.

Isn't it intended to teach us some deep reality that we find such a rest in our father's arms—that they seem stronger to us, and surer, and more loving, than any others? It seemed to me to make up for everything that had happened in that dreadful three-quarters of an hour which appeared to have been hours long, to find myself so tenderly carried upstairs, and laid in my own little bed, and tucked in by papa's hands, and hushed like a baby, while he whispered, 'My little Alice! my little motherless Alice!' until he thought I had quite gone to sleep.

Mrs. Blackett superintended Harry's concluding arrangements, with just such a tinge of severity in all her tuckings-in and foldings of the bed-clothes as was fitted to mark her disapprobation of nocturnal wanderings over the house when the formalities of going to bed had been gone through in an orthodox and conclusive manner. After all, she

did not view the matter so sternly as might have been expected, and any display of disapprobation on her part was, as she sometimes told us, only as the slight and wholesome acidity in raspberry-vinegar—the necessary admixture, without which the sweetness would not be beneficial.

Both she and our father had left us, and I thought Harry was fast asleep, when, even as before, I heard his voice calling to me through the open door,—

‘Alice!’

‘Yes, Harry,’ I said, wearily.

‘I’ll give you my new knife, with two blades and a gimlet and a boot-hook in it, and a thing for taking stones out of horses’ feet.’

‘Thank you, Harry dear,’ I said, too sleepy to resist the offer.

It was not long after that I heard his voice again,—

‘Alice!’

‘Yes, Harry.’

‘I’ll give you my new squirt, that sends water ever so far, and is so useful for all sorts of things, you know!’

‘Thank you, Harry dear,’ was the still sleepier reply.

A longer interval than the last. I was just off in my first real slumber of that night, when once more the silence was broken,—

‘Alice! Alice!’

‘Yes, Harry.’

‘If I give you the squirt all for yourself, will you mind my keeping the knife? because, you know, the gimlet and the other things would be no use to a girl, and you might cut yourself.’

But ere the conclusion of this address had been arrived at, I had gone too far into dreamland to return to any earthly transactions.

The next morning papa took us with him into the red drawing-room, and in full day-light I could hardly believe that it was the same place that only one night before had seemed peopled with horrors. There Harry told him all the history of Master Clarke’s recital, and, with less precipitation, however, than before to me, the more serious story of his own transgressions.

Our father looked very grave and sad. He always seemed to think that it was because we had no mother that things went wrong ; and he was just beginning to speak to Harry about all that had passed, when the church clock struck twelve, and immediately the whirring noise, which had so filled

us with terror the night before, sounded as if from beneath us, and brought me close to his side for protection.

‘And so this is the proud lady at her distaff!’ exclaimed papa, with a comical look in his eyes. ‘I suppose *I* must have some evil deeds to confess, as you and Harry have revealed yours. Let me think what they are!’

Somehow the noise sounded much less unearthly than before, and we could hardly believe, in the broad daylight and among various objects which now looked by no means alarming—above all, with our father by our side—that it had so filled us with terror only a few hours previously.

‘It comes from the room underneath,’ he said; ‘and sounds to me very much like the whirr of a clock before striking.’

Downstairs we went, each of us with a hand in his. Under the great red drawing-room ran a long, wide passage, connecting the harness and store-rooms with the servants’ hall. A large old-fashioned clock stood in the middle, against the wall, and its sonorous tick sounded through the whole length of the corridor. Papa called Mrs. Martin, who, with floury hands, came at his summons.

‘How often do you wind up this clock, Mrs. Martin?’

‘Once a-week, sir. It’s very old, sir; but it keeps time if one sets the hands a-fresh every other day or two by the church time.’

‘And does it strike the hours?’

‘Well, no, sir, not to say *strike* them. It always seems a-making up of its mind to strike, and gurgles like in its throat for ever hour and every quarter, like a person undecided of speaking; and it whirrs ever so loud, but it never comes to nothing. It might have been brought up in a deaf-and-dumb asylum for all the talking it does. The striking parts seems out of order like.’

Papa smiled. ‘Let us listen for the quarter,’ he said.

So we stood listening, and watching the clumsy old hands moving on to the quarter. The church clock struck. Whirr-rr-rr-rr went its colleague in the passage. Harry and I looked at each other, and papa looked at us both. ‘Harry,’ I said, ‘it was that all the time, and we thought it was the proud lady’s distaff; and it sounded so dreadful upstairs!’

Harry looked foolish. It was undignified for a boy to have been frightened by an old clock; and Mrs. Martin, who had felt the family honour to

have been increased since our undoubted authentication of the Beverley ghost-story, rubbed the flour and granules of dough off her hands, with a murmur to the effect that it was all very well for us to think so.

Then we went upstairs, still hand-in-hand with our father; and he talked very gravely, and still very kindly, to Harry about all that he had done wrong; and from that time took him out with him more, and arranged with Mr. Adams that he should go up to the Parsonage, and learn every day with Archie. And he spoke to us both about not being frightened by foolish stories, and said that he did not believe in Master Clarke's legends.

Then we all went together into the hall, and papa said that he thought the terrible portrait looked like one of a very peaceable old dame with green-grey eyes, who would be much more likely to spin warm stockings for little children than to make their grave-clothes beforehand; which made us laugh very much, while we owned that she looked more dull than cruel.

But there were some other words about conscience which he said and which I have never forgotten; and these have caused our history of

the night in the red drawing-room to pass into a family proverb, especially belonging, however, to Harry and me—to Harry, the dear old brother that has been like no other brother in the world to me all my life long.

And readers of this chronicle, which Harry and Georgie have made me write, will understand why, when any spontaneous confession of misdemeanours, or sudden remorseful disclosure of a troubled conscience, finds vent in the ears of the family, there is a saying amongst us that the penitent must have heard the proud lady's distaff in the red drawing-room.

III.

Harry : his Story.

" I CAN'T " LIES DOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE TREE :

" I WILL " CLIMBS IT.'



HARRY: HIS STORY.

"I can't" lies down at the bottom of the tree:

"I will" climbs it.

A SAYING coined long ago in our childhood, soon after our cousin Robert came to Copsley. The legend of a coat-of-arms, which, issuing forth from the Copsley Family Heralds' Office, represented a tree of gigantic proportions, at the topmost pinnacle of which appeared a human form nearly invisible, in consequence of its remote altitude, to the naked eye; a second human form, lying at the base, being engaged in taking observations of the remote human form through a telescope,

and wearing a sort of listless and slouching aspect, commonly to be seen in the idle beggar who refuses to work, as conventionally depicted on the covers of tracts.

It is humbling to be obliged to admit that the features of the listless and slouching character were understood to represent those of the writer; while I need hardly add that the elevated and pinnacled figure, portrayed somewhat in the attitude of Nelson on the top of the monument, was with equal fidelity intended as a memorial of our cousin, Robert Adairson.

Robert, Robin, Robbie, Bob, Robin Hood, Robin Adair, as he was, and is, indifferently styled among us, and to whose youthful biographical annals belongs the coat-of-arms with motto aforesaid, may or may not hold that I am taking liberties with his name in helping myself from those annals for the filling up of the quire of paper committed to me by Alice, on condition that a contribution from my pen should enrich the family chronicle in course of composition. But as, without some such little accommodation, the probabilities would be in favour of my resorting to her diaries or to Mrs. Blackett's account-books for any connected or chronological memoranda of

family history, the great principle must be held good in the present instance of helping myself first and asking leave after. For, as has been observed, there are who know not to write and know it; and there are who know not to write and know it not. And it is to the first of these classes that I claim exclusively to belong.

It was on a winter's day, a year or two after our entrance into possession of Copsley Hall, that our father told us our uncle Adairson was dead, and that his son Robert was to come and live with us. He had always resided quite in the north of England; his mother—our father's only sister—having died some years before: and we were told that he was to be just like our own brother, and would be a companion for me in my lessons and play.

'How old is he, papa?' was my first inquiry, as I hastily sought for data from which mentally to calculate cricketing and racing probabilities.

My father thought he must be about eleven years old; but declined committing himself to months.

'And has he no mamma?' said Alice, somewhat mournfully—'nobody left at all?'

'Nobody but us, little Alice,' he replied, with his hand upon her head: 'we must try to be.

papa and brothers and sisters to him when he comes.' And from that moment Alice occupied herself in devising means for the new-comer's entertainment of various kinds and descriptions, —the most self-sacrificing being the dedication to his sole future use of a choice cup and saucer forming one of her own cherished set: the former of which, bearing the legend 'The Orphan's Solace,' and representing on its outside a seraph in full angelic canonicals, struggling to look over the brim to where, at the bottom of the cup, a youth in a sailor's uniform appeared wiping his eyes, was supposed to be peculiarly appropriate to our new cousin's circumstances;—the question as to whether the angel, or the tea which might reasonably be supposed to entomb the orphan, would constitute his solace, being left in abeyance.

I was sliding in front of the hall-door some days after, when our coachman drove up in the dog-cart with a boy by his side; at the same time calling out to me to come and bid the young gentleman welcome to the Hall. To say that I was at the moment occupied in speculations exclusively concerning our expected cousin, would be to give but a faint idea of the thought and

deliberation which had possessed my mind in the contemplation of his arrival. Forms of catechetical inquiry addressed to my father, who unwearyingly placed me in possession of every particular of his fuller knowledge concerning Robert's antecedents, consultations with Alice as to his probable tastes, capabilities, and size, and addresses to Mrs. Blackett, prefaced with such interrogations as 'Do you think now he's in jackets yet?' and 'Haven't you known a great many boys of ten quite as big as boys of eleven?'—all these were only slight external symptoms of debates and internal speculations which had been carried forward in my own mind for a full period of three weeks, during which expectation had unceasingly maintained its conventional, if for a constancy practically inconvenient, position on tip-toe.

And yet, talk of shyness! Of young ladies' shyness, of infant shyness, of the shyness of antelopes and sensitive plants! Is there any moment of shyness comparable to that in which two boys are suddenly brought face to face with each other for the first time, and are mutually at a loss as to how they shall conduct the first advances?

My cousin Robert Adairson and I on that cold January morning silently and shyly surveyed each other at the distance of two yards ; while for nearly half a minute we debated within ourselves as to who should first say what. He will, I trust, now excuse my remarking, that during that brief period I had satisfaction in observing that I was slightly the taller of the two, and that, appraising furtively all that was appraisable of his muscular development, I arrived at a rapid conclusion that I might prove the stronger. He was by no means, at that period, of remarkable appearance ; but just a pale quiet-looking boy, with light brown hair, dark grey eyes, and freckled face ; while the deep mourning which he wore increased tenfold every difficulty that I experienced in addressing him, as I felt a confused desire to tell him how sorry I was for his father's death, which, on the other side, was counterbalanced by a clumsy fear of too suddenly reminding him of his recent loss.

‘ Bless the boys ! ’ exclaimed the coachman, as he surveyed us for a moment while handing down Robert's trunk to the footman, ‘ why, I thought they'd have been on each other's necks, like Jacob and Esau in the picture-books, afore I could have

turned round! When my poor brother's Tom came to us, he and our Will had knocked each other down, and shaken hands over it, while five minutes hadn't gone past. Come Master Harry, sir, take the young gentleman in, and get him warm this freezing day—that'll thaw you both, I reckon.'

I was only too glad of the suggestion of any line of action; and had just broken the ice moral to the best of my ability, by saying, 'Won't you come in and get warm?' when, running along the hall and tripping down the steps, came Alice, quite flushed up with excitement and with the desire to greet our new cousin. I wondered what she would say; but in one moment she had her hands in his, and was kissing him, while her hair fell over his shoulders: and I heard her tell him quite softly how glad she was he had come, and how we had been so sorry about his being left alone; but that he was to be our brother, and she would be his sister; and papa said one of the little puppies in the stables was to be for him; and she was sure he was very cold, and he must come and get warm by papa's fire; and Mrs. Blackett had some nice hot soup for him after his drive. In the course of which communications we marched in procession along

the hall, Robert and Alice hand-in-hand, and I behind, pondering as to why some things seemed to "come natural" to girls more than to boys.

'I like him very much,' was her first confidence to me, after communications with the stranger over his soup; I having slipped out, and returned from my fifth visit of inspection to the puppies, and Robert having disappeared at a summons from our father. 'And you'll like him, I'm sure. And he says he never went to school at his home—Harmanbury he calls it—but his father taught him; and I think he has had a great many lessons. And he knows chess, and can teach me. And he says he likes knives very much—he liked them best, but he likes steam-engines best now; and he has a picture of Uncle Adairson in his box that he'll show us, and we're to help him to unpack it. He travelled all yesterday by himself after they had seen him off; and he says he wasn't afraid; and the guard took him in part of the way and showed him how he stopped the wheels; and he says he can skate on the pond with you, and he asked me how old you were; and— isn't it funny?—our birthdays are on the same day, only he was eleven and I was only nine.' At the end of which rapid summary of our cousin's sentiments he him-

self entered the room, and asked Alice if she would like to come and help him to unpack.

‘Will *he* come?’ he asked, looking at me.

‘Will you, Harry?’ she repeated.

‘All right,’ was my reply.

‘Yes, he will,’ translated Alice; who, with the most entire unconsciousness, had accepted the position of medium between us two shy English boys, and who once more led the way with Robert, while I followed, wondering how they had contrived to become friends so quickly.

They stopped as we came to the broad oaken stairs. ‘How many steps can you jump?’ asked our cousin.

‘Three,’ said Alice; ‘but Harry can jump six. And oh, Harry, show him how you can get up the stairs, and turn over at the top!’

The suggestion of active exertion was exactly what I wanted; and the feat which in Alice’s estimation eclipsed all others was performed, consisting, as it did, of my clambering outside the banisters up the winding staircase, and climbing over at the top, in spite of the perilous proximity of a heavy chandelier suspended from the roof of the house.

Robert looked on with interest. ‘You try

now,' said Alice. Upon which he at once commenced similar operations; but, to my great delight, failed in the crowning evolution, in spite of two or three attempts.

'I'll do it to-morrow,' he said, surveying the scene of his failure. 'I'll come and try again.'

We two were to share a large attic, of many resources in the shape of holes and corners, and capable recesses suggestive of bed-room strategics such as are beloved by boys who know how to make the most of them; and we all three became very intimate as an equitable partnership of its advantages was agreed upon, and as we settled which shelves should hold Robert's books, and which should contain mine.

'Have you any books about steam-engines?' he asked, as he stooped to unfold the treasures of his trunk.

'No—at least none that I care for,' I replied; 'there's one somewhere up there called *Water and its Trades*; but it's very stupid, and I only read a little bit of it.'

Robert made no further remark; but proceeded to extract from his trunk a somewhat promiscuous collection of properties, which Alice helped him to stow away in different receptacles, selected more for

their proximity and handiness than for other recommendations.

‘Here’s the picture I told you of,’ he said, pulling a small morocco case from beneath a stratum of woollen stockings, and pushing it unopened into Alice’s hands. I looked over her shoulder at a miniature of a quiet-looking stern countenance, the grey eyes and high forehead of which would of themselves have sufficiently proclaimed that it represented Robert’s father. Our cousin looked heavily at us without speaking, while we examined the likeness; and I felt a return of the awkward shyness which results from an indecision as to what to say. Alice, however, seemed little at a loss; but, shutting it up, said quite simply, ‘We must put it away amongst the best things, with your Bible and Prayer-book. There’s a picture of our mamma who died, that papa is keeping for me. You know, we have no mamma either.’

Robert did not reply; but watched her silently, as with great care she enveloped the precious case in folds of pocket-handkerchiefs, and buried it with some of his best books in a sort of small cave in the wall originally intended to contain wood for the supply of the fire.

‘ Did you like him very much ? ’ I inquired at last, with as much desire to show sympathy as possible, but doubtful as to the mode of its expression.

‘ Like him ! ’ was the reply, in so low a tone of voice that I could hardly hear it ; while something in our cousin’s face told me that I was upon dangerous ground, and made me feel Mrs. Blackett’s entrance at the moment an opportune relief.

‘ Not in the fire yet ! ’ she said, resting from the exertion of ascending the winding staircase ; ‘ that’s good children ! And Master Adairson, my dear, you’ll be wanting a help with your unpacking, though I see Miss Alice is at work for you. But Miss Alice, dear, your cousin’s hat mustn’t stay on the towel-horse ; and those tops and skates and bats of his would be better in the hall-cupboard than arranged in a pattern under the window, like fancy skeletons in the Museum. And you know the drawer in the wash-stand is for his brush and comb, and not for a shirt and sponge, together with his best evening waistcoat : ’ during the course of which, and a series of similar practical remarks, Alice’s arrangements, which were of an unconventional description, rapidly gave way to others more orthodox and traditional in their nature.

‘And what’s this, my dear?’ further inquired Mrs. Blackett, as Robert revealed from recesses in his carpet-bag a concatenation of twine, fish-hooks, and steel chain, wherein were entangled a tooth-brush, some Latin exercises, dried specimens of sea-weed, and a boot-hook, which latter property having come in contact with a small receptacle containing pomatum, had broken its cover, and admitted its contents to intimate relationship with the whole collection.

‘It’s all got mixed up somehow,’ said Robert, ruefully. ‘I pushed it in when Mrs. Horne—that’s our housekeeper—wasn’t looking, for fear she’d say it was rubbish not worth bringing. I was trying to make a fishing-machine for our pond that I could leave for lesson-time, and that was to have weights, and to throw the fish, when it was caught, on the bank, by a spring, and then fall down again—at least I wanted to do that, but I’ve been trying at it for months and months, and never got it right yet. Papa said——’

The end of the sentence did not come, however, although Robert’s quiet undemonstrative manner betrayed less than his silence a fresh and realised grief; and he dived once more into his carpet-bag, which, containing, as it did, promiscuous

items in the shape of coloured marbles, specimens of madrepore, one or two broken knives, and fragments of wood bearing incipient carvings, all more or less connected by tangles of string, furnished me with interesting materials for observation. 'I pushed them in myself,' he repeated; 'for she'd have called them rubbish.'

If Mrs. Blackett's sentiments coincided secretly with those of the unknown Mrs. Horne, she was much too amiable to betray the concurrence of their views. On the contrary, upon Robert's allusion to his father, she possessed herself deliberately and with praiseworthy self-denial of the fishy tangle; and, though the task was distasteful to the natural woman, proceeded to undo knots and smooth out difficulties, in spite of its previous anointing.

'You and master Harry shall set your machine going in the lake here, my dear,' she said; 'and mind you have fish in for dinner every evening, and what's over we'll give away.'

'Do you like steam-engines?' asked our cousin, pausing in his carpet-bag researches to contemplate the gradual unravelment of his twine, and evidently won by her wholesome motherly face.

'Well, as to liking them,' replied Mrs. Blackett meditatively,—'as for *liking* them exactly, it's

hard to say, especially for a woman of my years, brought up to coaches, and, so to speak, in times of peace. They're wonderful things, my dear, and do their work in a manner to astonish all beholders: but, you see, all that snorting and screaming and pawing of the ground about it, never waiting for anyone, seems to me to show a wrong principle, of doing one's duty in a roaring noisy way, and not like ordering one's self lowly and reverently to all our betters. At least that's my sort of notion,' continued Mrs. Blackett, whose fingers as conscientiously as her tongue still continued doing the work upon which she had set them going; 'although, my dear, if you like them I've not got anything to say against it. But I shouldn't like one live about the house, as a matter of taste.'

'I can't make it out,' resumed Robert after a minute's interval, during which we considered Mrs. Blackett's testimony as to her sentiments, and were inclined to differ from the last; 'I've got to the cylinder and the vacuum and the piston, all right; but it's the valve and the working-beam that floor me. You see, when the water's put in the boiler——'

'Ah, my dear, to think of water—a pure, blessed gift of Providence from springs and mossy

brooks, coming to that! it's quite a lesson!' interposed Mrs. Blackett, feelingly. 'I have a cousin in that line myself, and so I said to him the last time I saw him at the Copsley gate. Of all the ends to see a blessing come to, it's the most like putting a person in his senses into Bedlam till he goes mad! To think of its going off into a fever, and screaming inside until it lets itself off in whistling—which is pretty much one as good as another—when it might have been giving drink to the flowers of the vale, and reflecting the clouds in its bosom! Yes, it *is* a lesson.'

Robert's face proclaimed dissentient views; while Alice's, at the poetical winding up of the picture, expressed sympathy with the flowers bereaved of their rightful nourishment.

'But then you put it to boil in the tea-kettle!' he replied, choosing his return argument with unwitting discretion, and plunging at once into a discussion; 'and it makes a noise then; and the lid bobs up and down. That's steam-work, too!'

Mrs. Blackett laid down the fish-hooks and the twine, and took off her spectacles, as one about to defend a principle. 'My good child,' she replied, almost insensibly adopting, as befitting

the importance of the subject, the form of address to which a spirit of charity entitles the catechumen in the Catechism, 'you can't compare that quiet and comely work, which is carried on night and day by the fires and on the hobs of England, with anything so rampagious and out of its senses as what we was speaking of. I've thought times on times when I've put it on, Sundays and week-days, and heard it singing as happy and contented as a bird over its work, That's a lesson for you, Sarah Blackett—always be cheerful and willing; and though you should come at last to being set down in the chimney-corner yourself, you may try and be of good to somebody; and, above all, eyes on or eyes off, be the same—always to be trusted to do your duty.'

'But that boils over sometimes, when no one's looking,' said Robert, who felt himself the champion of the steam-engine, but whose arguments were cut short by our dinner-bell summoning us downstairs.'

When I woke up for the first time the next morning, it was to behold my cousin standing without shoes or stockings on a high chair, and anxiously scanning the backs of my small and

miscellaneous collection of books. When I awoke the second time, it was to see him lying on his face in bed, with my despised book on mechanics open on the pillow, while the muttered words, 'A is the first valve, F, the connecting rod,' caught my ears. His first greeting to Mrs. Blackett, as we brought him on a visit to her parlour after breakfast, and at the conclusion of a series of evolutions on the stairs which he refused to abandon until the final performance at the summit had been satisfactorily accomplished, was equally indicative of the fact that, for the present, one object filled his mind.

'If you please, does your cousin that's in that line live near here?' he inquired. And it will be sufficient to add, in reference to those early days of our companionship, that the cousin in that line having been ascertained by our father to be a very respectable railway mechanic, competent to assist us in our first attempts in that branch of our researches, there resulted, after many months of joint and laborious enterprise, a rough working model of a steam-engine, which pursued its career on a level walk of the park, although still regarded by Mrs. Blackett somewhat as the offspring of a dangerous breed

recklessly allowed to go tame about the premises.

This first incident in our cousin Robert's life at Copsley was the index to a determination of character that carried the day in almost every object that he put before him; and if the 'going-at-it' principle is catching, I suppose that it was partly owing to him that all our avocations, whether in lessons or play, came to be regarded with an intensity and fervour such as I had never known before.

Robin had been for a year with us, and Mr. Adams was prophesying great things of him, when the circumstance occurred, afterwards memorialized by the family medal whereof mention has already been made in these pages.

A certain tall tree stood, and still stands, in an isolated position in the park, as if sent to Coventry, on account of its height and domineering aspect, by the poplars which gossip and shiver in sociable clumps and knots all round the enclosure.

We were out with our father one spring morning, when the wind was coming up freshly among the bursting leaves, and when the architect-birds were chattering over plans for the building

season, and when rheumatic old trees were heavily moving their great arms, and groaning as if wearied out by winter blasts; and Alice, looking up into the April sky, exclaimed, 'I wonder whether any one ever climbed to the top of that great tall tree! How funny the house and park must look from the highest bough!'

'When I was a boy,' said our father, 'a farmer's lad succeeded in climbing it; but I never knew any one else try. The bark is very slippery: I think you two youngsters had better practise upon it, and see if you can gain the lower boughs. Five shillings to the one who brings down a branch from the second range.'

In a moment Robin and I were at the foot of the tree, determined to swarm it; and, with hands and legs exerted to their utmost, we made futile attempts upon its smooth, slippery stem. My father looked on with amusement, and Alice, with admiration.

'It's no use,' I said, after many unsuccessful attempts; 'we might just as well try to climb a factory chimney. I give up.'

Robin, equally baffled, looked up through the boughs, as if for inspiration. 'It's this slippery stem that's the pull,' he said; 'and I can't say I

see how one's to get up the first five yards. The rest wouldn't be so much.'

The next morning our cousin came in to breakfast very much out breath, with red face and redder hands, and exhibiting every sign of having been hard at work for some time.

'The wind's been your hairdresser this morning, Master Rob,' said my father, cutting a huge slice of bread and butter, and laying it on his plate.

'He's been climbing,' said Alice: 'he told me he wouldn't give up trying; and he went out at seven this morning to try again.'

'Am I to give you a cheque on my bankers for five shillings yet?' said my father, surveying Robin's ruffled plumage, or, to speak more literally, his frowsy hair, green trousers, and powdered coat.

'I don't want to be beaten,' said Robin, in intervals of the assault on his plate. 'How old was the farmer's lad who once climbed to the top?'

'Well, I should say fifteen or thereabouts,' replied my father. 'I know he was older than I, and that I admired his performance not a little.'

The day wore on; and in the afternoon, missing Robin and Alice, I travelled over the house in quest of the former. The library-door was open as I passed by, and, looking in, I beheld my cousin seated at the top of the library-steps, while Alice, established on the floor at the bottom, listened with profound reverence to fragmentary results of his investigations, as, with a dusty volume of an Encyclopædia spread out on his knees, he turned over pictures of walls and fortresses taken by escalade, and consulted with her as to the adaptability of such methods of operation to present circumstances.

‘You see, Alice,’ he was saying, as I came to the door, ‘it would never do for me to give in, if I *can* do it. You know it says “Never say die!”’

‘Yes,’ replied Alice, confidently, but yet with some hesitation, as she tried to recall the place from which he quoted.

‘I think,’ continued Robin, generalizing his principle, ‘that everybody—almost every man, I mean, who has worked up in the world—has climbed something—something hard, when he was a boy. You know, Alice, I’ve read about lots em.’

‘ I know you have,’ replied Alice, earnestly.

‘ There was Peter the Great,’ continued Robin from his altitude, ‘ who climbed the masts and the rigging before he would be an emperor ; and there was Clive, who climbed the steeple at Market Drayton ; and there was—there was—oh, I know ! —Simon Stylites, who climbed to the top of a pillar and lived there——’

‘ And never came down ?’ said Alice, with a momentary anxiety in her voice, lest Robert might be induced to adopt the top of the tree as an airy permanent residence.

‘ No, I don’t think he ever did,’ continued our cousin ; ‘ and there was——’

‘ King Charles in the oak,’ suggested Alice.

‘ Yes, King Charles, and ever so many more,’ he replied : ‘ so, you see, it’ll be no use if I give in.’

And this was the prelude to a persistent continuation in assaults upon the tree singled out for escalade, in which for many days I acted as a comparatively unimportant second, Robin’s intentness in the matter placing my feebler efforts at a very low discount.

‘ It wouldn’t be fair to cut notches in the bark,’ he said, one morning, after a series of fruitless endeavours, and still looking up into the branches ;

‘but I will get to the top of it if I try every day for a year.’

‘Wait till you’re a year older and stronger,’ I said; ‘we’ll both be better able then.’

‘Oh, I hope he won’t wait!’ said Alice: ‘it would be such a pity not to do it after all.’

My father was passing by, and listened, with amused countenance, to the council of war. He sometimes laughed at Robin’s determination to do whatever he set his hand to; but it was always with an encouraging word, which our cousin, who loved him as we did, drank in and remembered.

‘The five shillings will hardly pay for ruined trousers and hopelessly destroyed waiscoats, Master Robin,’ he remarked. ‘I am beginning to be afraid of meeting Mrs. Blackett, lest she should ask me what I mean by putting the young gentlemen up to the destruction of their most respectable garments.’

‘I’d dress in a squirrel-skin, if the climbing came with it,’ said Robert. ‘Uncle, don’t you think you could try too, and show us?’

‘When you’ll borrow the mantle of some respectable old orang-outang for me,’ said my father, ‘warranted to climb without difficulty, and to come down safely.’

That night as we two were going up to bed, Alice's door opened, and she herself appeared on the landing, still in her white evening dress, and looking spirit-like in the moonlight.

'I hope they won't mind,' she said, hastily; 'but I've heard a story—that's to say, I read it—and I've caught a beetle, or a cockroach, I don't know which. It was on the wall by my bed, and I wouldn't undress until I had brought it for Robin; and here it is.' With which words, and from within a covered wine-glass, she produced a lively occupant, which she carefully deposited in Robin's hand.

'Alice! why, what do you mean?' we inquired, in one breath; our cousin's attention taking the practical form of re-imprisoning the bewildered animal while its destiny should be revealed.

'I read it in an old book at the bottom of a box in the lumber-room before I came upstairs,' said Alice, still speaking excitedly; 'and then, when I saw this one, just where the light shines in and makes a pattern on the wall, I thought it was come on purpose; and I knew nurse would drown it or kill it somehow if I kept it till to-morrow, and I brought it up to Robin for his tree.'

The comparative anatomy by which any connexion was to be arrived at between Alice's recital,

Robin's enterprise, and the captive cockroach, still failed us.

'I don't make out yet,' said Robin, listening gravely—much more gravely than I, who asked whether the animal was to carry him up on his back to the top of the tree.

'I was afraid you'd laugh at me,' said little Alice, speaking rather nervously; 'but it seemed to be something like the Persian up at the top of the tower, and I was so pleased to think of helping Robin.'

'The Persian at the top of the tower!' we both exclaimed, while I began to think that my sister was walking, or at all events talking, in her sleep.

'There was a poor Persian,' said Alice, rather timidly addressing her audience, 'and he was put at the top of a high tower by a very cruel king, and left to starve there. And then his wife came to the bottom of the tower, and was crying very much; and he said, "Don't cry, but try and help me." And she said, "What can I do?" And he said, "Bring three things—a beetle, a little butter, and a reel of cotton." So she brought the things, and he called out to her to tie the thread round the beetle's neck—his neck or his legs, I forget which exactly—and to rub a little butter

on its nose, and then to put it at the bottom of the tower; and so she did, and it always thought the butter was a little way before it, and it wanted to get it, and it went up, up, up, till it came to the top, to the man; and then she fastened some packthread to the thread, and he drew up the packthread; and then he told her to tie some string to the packthread, and he drew up the string; and then she tied a rope to the string, and he drew up the rope, and fastened it well at the top of the tower, and came down by it, and escaped.'

Robin and Alice took the tree-climbing enterprise in a much more serious spirit than I did, and the former silently considered the enlivening anecdote which my sister had come into the passage to tell us, with a view to its bearing on the undertaking in hand, and then looked at the cockroach, plainly visible in the bright moonlight, by way of estimating its value as an ally.

'I see how she means,' he said, thoughtfully; 'but then, you see, the Persian was at the top of the tower and wanted to get down, while I'm at the bottom of the tree and want to get up.'

'But I thought—I thought,' said Alice,—'no; I see—I'm afraid it won't do, and I must go away—I don't think I should stay—but I thought, if it

could go over the bough, and then come down again and bring the thread over the bough, we could pull up the packthread, and at last the rope. I'm afraid it's no good, however,—but I do want you to get up, Robin !'

A sudden inspiration darted into Robert's mind, which took the immediate turn of causing him to throw a book which he held in his hand, high up into the air. 'Alice !' he said, 'you're first-rate ! I do think girls have double wits instead of strength. I see it now ! I do believe you've got hold of the right way ——'

'My beetle ?' said Alice, with a timid hope, and looking quite affectionately in the direction of the wine-glass.

'No, not exactly that ; but the way—the principle, as they call it. You had better go to bed now ; but I'll show you to-morrow the first thing, and you're a—a—I don't mean a brick like a boy, of course, but the same thing in girls ;' which gallant effort of Robin's to translate into chivalrous and feminine language the highest expression of boy appreciation, sent my sister palpitating with pleasure to her own little room, from which she had come forth to promulgate the workings of her brain.

It's wonderful with women—women in frocks

and women to the end of their days—how they're always the ones to throw themselves into our difficulties, and to help us out with all their strength; putting the honour and the glory away from themselves, and just happy if they can succeed for those whose pleasure is more to them than their own success or comfort.

Early the next morning Robin was up and dressing. 'Come along, old fellow!' he was exclaiming as I woke up, 'I believe we've got hold of it at last;' and, somewhat sleepily, I consented to being dragged out of bed.

He was at Alice's door before I had finished my morning toilet, and was only disposed of by a promise from within, endorsed by the nurse in office, that if he'd be off and downstairs, like a good boy, Miss Alice should follow when she was ready. 'You know, Master Robin,' she remonstrated from her seclusion, finishing up with a general application, 'you young gentlemen can dress immediate, and go on for all the world like monkeys in the Zoologicals; and, as says to Mrs. Blackett, if only you could be painted like the ancient Britons in the pictures, and sent to the wash twice a-week and got up directly, what a saving it would be for them as has to mend and mend and patch after you,

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when your clothes is all out at knees and elbows in particular: but young ladies is different, and Miss Alice can't expect——'

'I think I'd like to be painted blue,' said Alice's smaller voice as I passed the door; 'and I'd wear a little frock made out of rabbits' skins, that wouldn't wear out, and——' But we lost the conclusion of the picture when a splash, as of a cold bath, gave notice of internal proceedings in process.

Robin positively refused to begin operations in the park until Alice appeared; and occupied himself meantime in collecting bows and arrows in the hall, and in levying a tax on Mrs. Blackett's resources in the shape of a reel of silk, a ball of twine, and other war-material. Then, when we were all collected together under the tree, even Georgie and Mary assisting, with a vague idea of something unusual being in progress, he began to disclose his plans.

'It's Alice's notion,' he said.

'No, the Persian's,' rejoined Alice, conscientiously.

'Well, the Persian's, only without the beetle. You see I've a bow and arrow here, and there's silk—it's good, strong purse-silk—fastened on to the end of the arrow; and what we've to do is to send the arrow over the lower bough—that

strong one, you see, and then we'll fasten the twine to the silk——'

'And then the string, and then that great rope,' cried Alice, joyfully; 'just like the Persian!'

'The hardest bit of work will be fastening the rope,' continued Robin, seriously. 'We must try and twist it loosely round and round the stem, and tie it at the bottom, under this great bit of root that seems to make a sort of wooden loop in the ground just on purpose: it's about the only good-natured bit of the whole tree.'

'Now shoot,' said Alice, anxiously; while first Robert, then I, sent forth the arrow with silken thread attached. Our aim was not successful. We first sent it too low, then too high, and, at last, agreed to practise with a disengaged arrow until breakfast-time.

My father noticed the pre-occupied countenances of all five of us—Georgie being so full of the enterprise that he could talk of nothing else, while little Mary begged for bow and arrows that she might try to help with her tiny hands. He listened with much and edifying gravity to the project for storming the solitary tree, which now almost figured to us as a great giant that was to be overcome and conquered.

‘I suppose it’s all fair, uncle?’ said Robert,

‘Quite fair,’ replied my father: ‘anything but a ladder comes within your articles of war. But, Robin, if you don’t succeed after all, I shan’t think the less of your perseverance; while, to say the truth, if you and Harry win the day, I shall be in a fidget for your legs and arms.’

‘They’ll be all right once we get among the boughs,’ said Robin; while I inwardly doubted their ever arriving so far.

‘You should have been young Cretans,’ said my father, ‘and have had your breakfasts hung up until you shot them down.’ And we two boys, who understood him, listened while he repeated what he called a very improving portion of poetical composition:—

‘Have we not read in old historic annals
(Brought down to youth in Pinnock’s Goldsmith’s
channels)

Of one original and anxious feat
Daily performed by juveniles of Crete,
Whose fond progenitors—so stories go—
Taught then from cradledom to use the bow?
Unlike the youths which modern ages own,
Who sleep in nightcaps and repose on down,
The youthful Cretan, nurtured midst alarms,
Gained e’en his frugal meal by force of arms.

Behold his breakfast from a height suspended !
The Lilliputian, with his bow extended,
Withdraws fresh arrows from his tiny quiver,
And vainly tries the plaguey string to sever.
O, cruel fate, such prospects should he lose !
He aims once more—they fall upon his nose.
Thus, while of labour he enjoys the fruit,
The young idea is learning how to shoot ;
And, as he hungrily claims bread and rice, I
Can hear him shouting, *Veni, vidi, vici!*'

Our success was not, however, so speedy ; although Robin would not hear of any other occupation after the conclusion of morning lessons with Mr. Adams. Our skill was not equal to his determination ; and when arrows did reach their mark, and fell over the tree, the silk sometimes caught and broke ; until at last the arrow was armed at once with twine, which somewhat impeded its flight. I was rather wearying of the whole undertaking, and had gone to the extent of traitorously meditating a retreat and a row on the lake with Archie Adams, if only it would not seem faint-hearted in the eyes of the family jury, when a small shout from Alice and the little ones, echoed at a respectful distance by the gardener's children and the coachman's, who increased the numerical importance of the spectators,

announced the successful descent of the arrow exactly in an appropriate direction. Alice's colour came and went with eagerness underneath her brown hat, as she helped Robin to attach the sturdier string to the twine, and anxiously reproduced particulars concerning her Persian. And when the long rope which had been procured from the stables was fairly drawn across a strong bough, and the two ends in his hands were loosely wound round and round the slippery tree, and made fast in a stout knot at the bottom, expectation began to grow feverish, and the thermometer of our hopes rose steadily.

It was not till the afternoon that the ascent was attempted. The coachman's children and the gardener's again assisted distantly; and one or two of the servants were kind enough to encourage us by their presence; and Master Clarke came up the park, as if his office required it of him; while Archie Adams, protesting that he never knew such a piece of work about climbing a tree, came to have a try all the same: so that the support of numbers was, to a certain extent, given us. Robin looked as if it were something for life that he was about, he was so grave and quiet: but then he did everything soberly upon which he had fixed his mind; and

always seemed to be saying to himself that, if he gave up, he would be turned back generally in future life and its undertakings.

He, first, threw off his jacket and began work, using the successive strands of rope as supports for hands and feet; but, after many struggles, he was obliged to let himself down again faster than he came up. My turn succeeded; then Archie's; but we did not improve upon his efforts; and, after more than half an hour's alternate trials and failures, we two agreed to leave to my cousin the sole honour and glory of the exploit, and retreated to the lake-side with as little ostentation as possible. Alice alone remained as a faithful onlooker. 'I think it's just like Columbus,' she said, gravely; 'and I hope he'll not give up.'

About an hour after, as we rowed lazily up the lake, Archie's long sight discovered something unusual at the summit of the great tree around which ropes and ropes had been for some time intertwined.

'I believe he's done it after all!' he exclaimed, and, hastily fastening the boat, we ran off at full speed across the park. Alice, shading her eyes, was still alone at her post; and, steadfastly looking up to where, at the tip-top of the conquered giant,

Robin was cautiously poised, seemed much too excited to join in the spontaneous hurra which no rightly-constituted English boy or man can ever refuse to successful muscular exertion, of whatever description. Then we looked at Robin through my shilling telescope, by way of conveying to him a delicate compliment as to the greatness of his elevation; while he tranquilly wiped his forehead with his disengaged hand, refraining, in a fear of seeming triumphant which belonged to all his successes, from inviting us to join him in his airy situation.

A sudden thought darted into Alice's mind. 'Don't get down, Robin! mind you don't get down!' she cried. 'I'll come back in a minute!' And, flying towards the house, she left us looking after her, and wondering as to her errand.

Not for long, however: for in a few minutes a family party came down the path, at the head of which she dragged my father by the hand, who was followed by the Curate, who happened to have been with him at this crisis; while, at a respectful distance, Mrs. Blackett preceded two or three of the upper servants whom Alice had hastily impressed as spectators.

My sister carried in her hand a small flag,

hurriedly snatched up from the relics of some past school festivity, and bade me call out to Robin to let down a string by which it might be drawn up. To this our cousin for some moments demurred; but Alice's entreaties gained the day, and he rather reluctantly obeyed. It was evident that she looked upon the ceremony somewhat in the same light as planting the token of dominion on a conquered citadel; and though the general exhortation, 'LOVE ONE ANOTHER,' which, until defaced by later storms, floated admonitorily over the park from the summit of Robin's tree, might not, in its direct application, appear to have any marked connexion with his achievement, there was a general murmur among the back row of spectators as to the fitness of the style of commemoration. I could not, however, see the force of Mrs. Martin's nod and remark to Mrs. Blackett that she hoped such words wouldn't wear out; and that there was no knowing whether they mightn't be as good ten years hence as they were now—a matter-of-fact truism hardly worth mentioning.

Robert did not seem at all elated when he descended once more to the ordinary level of humanity, his garments and knuckles bearing marks of warfare. On the contrary, when the Curate kindly struck up 'See, the conquering hero

comes !' and when my father shook hands with him with a ' Well done, Rob Roy—there's nothing like not giving in !' he looked as if he wished it were possible to avoid all notice, and as if, having acted up to his own determination, this was quite enough to satisfy him.

Of course after a time, when the achievement fell into the past, and when a memorial-cake denoting Mrs. Martin's sympathy and appreciation, and having for its centre ornament a green erection, called by courtesy a tree, with a flag at the top, was eaten, Robin's success died away from immediate importance; except, perhaps, from Alice's mind, to which it ever afforded a fresh field for admiration. Though, indeed, to this period must be assigned a couplet popularly attributed to Master Clarke, the village oracle, and ever after familiar to Copsley-park hearers,—

' Alice the maid, and Harry the heir,
Must look aloft for Robin Adair,'

—a couplet which has come at last to be as much a part of Robin's insignia as the proverb to the elucidation of which this rapidly-diminishing quire of paper is dedicated.

And now, being pretty much in for it, and having more than fulfilled every fraternal obli-

gation in the full, true, and minute account of the birth and parentage of the family saying in question, I can find neither just cause nor impediment—unless the possible sequestration of these memoirs by the subject of them himself—why I should not for my own pleasure show further how it has ever since proved a pretty fair working-oar, as far as Robert Adairson is concerned.

We were on different sides of thirteen when, soon after, we went to a public school. Although I might have been supposed to care most about leaving Copsley, it did not seem to be so; and I believe that when my father bade us both good-bye, I derived more immediate consolation from the golden comfort deposited in the palm of my hand than did Robin; although, of course, it cheered us both in the end. Finally, we shook into our places in school and playground as boys always do; and made our school friendships and alliances with increased fervour, from having been formerly isolated, to a certain extent, in the seclusion of country life.

I won't say that I stuck through thick and thin to Robin; but I know that I owe whatever luck I had in squeezing up from lower forms to his sticking through thick and thin to me.

Public schools and their systems, and fagging, and Latin grammars, have been of late so turned inside-out before the public, that society might reasonably request that, the boys being undertaken and the bills sent in quarterly, there might be an end of the matter. I shall not, therefore, attempt a history of our school-days, details of which are familiar at Copsley; but shall merely state that then, as before, I had soon need of my telescope to look for Robin among the branches of our scholastic tree.

I remember very well a walk we took together, after we had been for four years among the wheels of the great school-machine which was to turn us out into the lap of Alma Mater, until her maternal training should launch us into the world's larger and wider school-room.

It was a Saint's day, and, consequently, a half-holiday; and the warm afternoon invited us on as we strolled down the river's banks, until a clump of overhanging trees tempted us to rest under their shade. I don't think we were either of us much inclined to talk, and perhaps mutual consent in silence is as fair a test of true and conscious friendship as any other; while the influences of a warm afternoon, a slow river, and a lazy solitude, commonly combine against communicative tendencies.

Robin was throwing pebbles at a crest of leaves which raised itself where, in the centre of the stream, the water was languidly circulating; and I lay back, drowsily watching him.

‘Better leave off and have a doze, old boy,’ I remarked, after a quarter of an hour had passed away; ‘you’ll not send them floating at that rate.’

‘But I will,’ replied my cousin, while, at the same moment, a more dexterous aim from his hand tumbled the leafy family into the water, and we soon lost sight of them at the turn of the river.

‘It’s very queer!’ he said, throwing himself back; ‘I wonder whether other people have ever felt the same. It has sometimes seemed to me as if one’s success—one’s fate, almost—depended upon a trifle like that. Of course I don’t really believe it; but still, if I hadn’t knocked those trumpery leaves over to-day, I’m not sure whether I shouldn’t have come up again, and had a fling at them to-morrow.’

‘My impression is that you would,’ I replied, coolly.

We neither of us spoke again for some minutes. I was sleepy, and he sat thinking, until the distant sound of the Cathedral bells came up along the water.

‘How they seem to put one’s thoughts to

music!' he said, after a time; 'and to tune them right when they get coarse and out of tune.'

'You're getting out of my reach, as usual, Rob,' I answered. 'If it wasn't for me, I believe that your "grand aspirations," as Alice calls them, would take you on their wings, and carry you out of the sight of us ordinary mortals.'

'Grand aspirations!' he replied: 'that's just where she is wrong. I mean, it's when one listens to thoughts that chime in with the bells coming up the river, one sees the things one has to work for and that get applauded, are not grand, but just low and common after all.'

'Do you mean, in plain English suited to my understanding, that the exhibition and scholarship, with University honours in reserve, are hardly worth trying for?' I inquired, jestingly; 'because, if you'd hand me over your chances, I'd make a good profit upon them.'

'No; I mean to get—I mean, I intend to try for them all,' he replied, deliberately. 'I *must*,' he continued, after another pause; 'for, of course, I must make my way in the world, and I'm not the heir of Copsley.'

'Stuff!' was my rejoinder.

'It would be stuff if I wished for wealth, or if

you cared for it,' he said; 'but we don't: so that we have only just the plain facts before us,—you must work, because you've a ready-made position to work in, if there's any good in you; and I must work to gain a position to work in. I'm not going to be dependent on your father, Harry.'

'I believe you're as much, if not more, to him than any of us,' I answered, half savagely; for I hated the idea of my being born to wealth, and Robin to comparative poverty.

He hardly noticed my remark, but went on as if I had not interrupted him. 'I'd rather have to make my own way. I believe it's the best inheritance one can have—poverty, and a head and hands. It's only working out the old story, "Cut down for thyself in the land of the giants."'

'What old story?' I inquired, after a momentary and fruitless recourse to my remembrances of the classics.

'My father told it me when I was a small boy at Harmanbury. He knew that he was not likely to live, I suppose, and he was determined that I should go out into the world with something of the battle spirit. He was what people call severe and stern—not a bit like your father; and I'd rather have died than let him see me turn soft. He would some-

times let me try for hours at doing a thing for myself, before he would show me how, and he never allowed me to give up anything I tried at. But then, when I succeeded, he would say, "You see it's worth while trying;" and that was enough for me.'

'And did he send you into the land of the giants?'

'That was after the last time he was able to sit up.

'It was Sunday night, hailing and sleeting, and the wind roaring furiously. It had grown quite dark, and the fire was burning low, and he had been still for more than an hour. Suddenly the door-bell rang violently, and after a few minutes, Mrs. Horne came hurrying in. "What's to be done?" she said; "that poor body, Jane Greaves, has got taken with fits, and is half-dying; and there's not a soul in the house but those two poor brats. One of them's come through the storm to tell me, and's crying in the kitchen; and my belief is, she'd have been blown away if she hadn't been drowned first to steady her down."

'Jane Greaves was a soldier's wife, who had been deserted some months before by her drunken husband, and who lived alone in a dilapidated cottage, the only habitable abode between our house and the village, which was more than a mile

off. In some of those Lancashire villages, the houses seem pretty much as if they had been thrown down promiscuously, and without any kind of reference to each other.

“The doctor must be sent for,” said my father: “some one must go to Brecon instantly!”

“If some one can be found on a night like this to go nearer three miles than two across the moor,” Mrs. Horne muttered indistinctly. “Besides, there’s no one to be got nearer than the village, and that’s losing a mile each way.” For our house was a good way on the road to Brecon.

“I’ll try and get down to Jane myself,” said my father, hastily, and standing up from his chair. He had studied medicine a good deal; and was often consulted by the poor people in those out-of-the-way districts, where doctors are so hard to be got at. I remember how deeply he felt suffering that he could not remove; and how, when he was strong, he would walk off over the hills to any distance to bring medicine to any sick person. That night, however, he hardly knew how ill he had himself become. He had not stood up for a moment before he turned quite white, and fell back into his chair. He looked as if he were dying; and I felt too frightened to speak, until after a minute I heard him

say to himself,—“It has come nearly to the last : but he that endureth to the end the same shall be saved.” Then, after a few moments, and when Mrs. Horne had put some vinegar to his forehead, he revived, and said, exactly in his usual quiet voice, “Robert, go for the doctor to Brecon at once; and mind you see him yourself, and tell him I beg that he’ll lose no time in coming to Jane Greaves !”

‘I stood up directly, but I’m afraid there was a moment’s hesitation in my manner, while Mrs. Horne exclaimed, “Master Robin, sir! Why, the angels themselves wouldn’t come out on a night like this, but would send their servants on their messages! The wind’s like wild beasts on the moors, and the snow’s beginning to fall thick : I’d sooner go myself!”

‘My father never repeated a command, and I should as soon have dreamt of flying as of questioning an order he had given me. He did not speak another word, but I knew that his eye was upon me; and, hastily putting on my strongest boots and my little overcoat, I opened the door and went out into the night.

‘That roaring, blustering, stormy night! My path lay right across the moor, and through the

Brecon wood over the hill; and there is no doubt that I was afraid with the fears which belong to such times. I can remember now the sentences which the wind seemed to howl out in my ears, and the hissing sound of the hail and snow as it cut my face and blinded my eyes, and the shapes which the shadows of the trees assumed as I drew near them. Of course I remembered stories of wolves and highwaymen, and of people buried in the snow; but I would have braved everything rather than have returned to my father without having done what he told me. So I tramped on, fighting against the wind, and trying to see, as well as to feel, my way, until, after more than an hour's hard work, I saw the lights of Brecon before me. It is just a little bit of a town—our post-town—and has a few shops; and I felt quite brave again as I knocked at Dr. Mayne's door, and asked if he was at home.

“No:” Dr. Mayne was sleeping that night at Harping Forge, where his father lived; and Harping Forge lay three miles further on.

“But couldn't you send some one to him?” I said to the maid, who surveyed me curiously. “I've come from Mr. Adairson, from Harmanbury; and there's a woman very ill—perhaps dying.”

“I don’t know who’s to go,” she said, rudely. “I’m not going on a night like this. I expect you’ll have to go yourself, young gentleman; master’s got the gig over there.” And then the door was shut in my face.

‘My heart sank within me. Three miles further up in the hills, and the storm more furious than ever! But I could not hesitate for a moment. My father’s words, “Mind you see him yourself,” were my terms of commission; and if Harping Forge had been ten miles further off, I could not have given up my embassy, or returned unsuccessful.

‘After leaving Brecon, the path, with which I was perfectly familiar by daylight, though it now seemed so strange, winds along the side of the hill, and then crosses a wild tract of moor almost on the top of the ridge upon which lies Harping Forge. And here it seemed as if all the elements had settled to have one final battle. My coat scarcely served to turn off the melting snow, and my hands were numb with the effort to keep my cap over my ears. And as I went along, a sort of passion of distress at the remembrance of my father’s departed strength, together with a dreary sense of the loneliness and forlornness of my position, began to take possession of me. I knew quite well that had he

been able to go himself, no inducement would have prevailed on him to send me; and I was perfectly sure that it was because God's poor people were more to him than any other consideration that he had not kept back his own child when no better messenger for aid was at hand. I knew that he would long to see me back safely, and yet that he would think first of the doctor for the poor woman; and then there came to my mind the remembrance of those words, "he that endureth to the end," which he had uttered in his faintness and weakness, and I wondered whether "the end" was near to him—nearer than I knew.

'You will think I must have been a romantic sort of boy for eleven years old, Harry, when I tell you that those words rang out like a battle-cry in my ears—that they gave me a sense of dignity in fighting and enduring which I had not known before. I have always thought that I left my childhood on the moor that night; when the storm and the wind and hail became to me real spirits of the power of the air, with whom I was to do battle as one enduring to the end, and when, from fear and distress, I rose to a sort of triumph and strange joy in having been singled out to meet them, and to conquer. I suppose that there was a

sense of excitement in my struggle alone and at that hour of the night, which had something to do with it; but my father's pale face and faint words were foremost in my thoughts.

‘The wind began to fall, as if I had won the victory, while I climbed up the steep bank to where a red light shone out from the silent Forge; and at the top I paused for a minute to take breath. It had ceased snowing; and the moon had risen up high, and was shining through rifts of heavy fleecy clouds on the valley from which I had been mounting up, and on a reach of silver sea beyond. Mrs. Horne had said the angels wouldn't be out that night, but I thought they were; for there seemed shadowy flittings over the snow which was glistening everywhere; and instead of howlings like wolves from stormy gusts of wind, I almost fancied I could hear rushing voices out of the fir-woods taking up the words, “enduring to the end—enduring to the end.” I do not remember my mother; but I have sometimes thought she must have been near me then; and although I wasn't given to putting my thoughts into words, or even to translating feelings into thoughts, I found myself half-unconsciously repeating part of the Collect of that day:—“Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of dark-

ness and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life; for Christ's sake. Amen."

'The Doctor, who came directly, drove me home with him, and dropped me at the Parsonage-house; going on himself to Jane Greaves' cottage, where Mrs. Horne was already actively engaged. It was past eleven when I returned, and my father was sitting where I had left him.

"“You are late, Robert,” he said, quietly: “what kept you?”

"“Dr. Mayne was not at home, sir,” I replied: “he was at Harping Forge.”

"“I hope you went on till you found him?”

"“Yes, sir,” I said; “he brought me back in his gig. He is at the cottage now.”

"“That is right,” said my father; “now get your supper and go to bed. I hoped I might trust you.”

'I obeyed instantly. I suppose that our remote life far away in the hills, and my father's rigorous ideas of discipline and implicit obedience, had made habits of silence, and even of outward severity, a second nature in our home, where there was no mother. I know when I came to Copsley it was to a world of freedom, of which I had never dreamed; and yet his 'That is right'—the highest form of commendation I ever received—was more to me

than any praise; and I fell asleep with a dim battle-vision looming before me, of which the conflict with the winds on Harping Moor was an inauguration—of battle to be waged against the works of darkness in the armour of light, and in which I, too, must endure to the end.

‘The next day my father did not come down, and he desired me to prepare my lessons for him, and then to bring them to his bed-side. I never knew till afterwards how thoroughly he had taught me, and how much more carefully than other boys are generally instructed. He had a great contempt for any but public schools, and had determined to prepare me for one himself. When you tell me I’m successful, Harry, I feel that it has all been his doing. He went to the bottom of every thing; not charging my mind with a great many subjects at once, but letting me feel that no surface-work would do, and that no excuse for carelessness would be admitted. “I should be ashamed to hear of your ever giving up anything that you once undertook, Robert,” he would often say, “if that thing were not wrong or impossible.”

‘On this morning he went through the usual course of lessons, while I stood beside him; and then he told me he wished to speak to me.

“A long time ago,” he began, “when a great people were brought into a promised land, one of the greatest of their tribes needed larger space. They came to Joshua, their leader, and asked for a fresh portion; but he said,—‘If thou be a great people, get thee up to the wood country, and cut down for thyself there in the land of the Perizzites and the giants, if Mount Ephraim be too narrow for thee.’ Then they answered that the Canaanites were too strong for them; but he still gave them the same answer. Then they said that the enemies had chariots of iron, and that they could not drive them out; and he said as before, ‘Cut down for thyself, for thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they *have* iron chariots and though they *be* strong.’

“Can you tell me on what authority Joshua gave them this assurance? It was written concerning the children of Joseph, in the old charter of promise given by Jacob when he was dying, that their bow should abide in strength, and the arms of their hands be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; and Moses had echoed the same promise centuries after, in another form of blessing.

“I am going to leave you, Robert,” he went on, “and you will have to fight the battle of life; and it, too, may be in the land of the giants. I

mean that poverty and loneliness and difficulty may come up against you, and greater giants than these—unbelief and worldliness, and suspicion; and I want you to remember that you must cut down *for yourself* in their land—that you must not rely on other men, but work well, and with all your strength, to be a brave, true, religious man—not cast down by difficulties, but getting stronger *through* difficulties, and holding a high aim always before you. And you'll never do this unless your arms are made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; and, though the world doesn't think so, I don't call any man great whose faith in God isn't like the faith of a little child.

“ I know you understand me, Robert; for you are older than your years, and I have spared neither care nor discipline to fit you for the future. I'm not afraid of your forgetting what I say. Remember, every real victory over yourself, and over difficulty, must be gained in the armour of light; and these are the victories which are put down in the book of the wars of the Lord.”

‘ He died a few days after,’ continued Robin. ‘ When he gave me his blessing he told me of the letter that he had written to Uncle Beverley, appointing him my guardian, and of his having put

away part of my mother's money for my education; and then I heard him say her name once or twice. His last words were, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justified!"'

We were both quite still when Robin finished his history, and I was trying to imagine that strange life of his, so much beyond his years, when he was among the moors alone with his father. It seemed to me to have a sort of Spartan hardness and coldness about it that repelled me, as I contrasted it with my own childish days; while yet I perceived that veneration for my uncle's memory had been to him almost a second religion.

'You've done some of the cutting-down, at all events, old fellow,' I said to him at last: 'you've not stood at difficulties.'

'There are the real giants beyond,' he said, 'with the chariots of iron; with a sort of cutting, sarcastic sophistry—an irony which would mow down true living hope and faith. Those clear bells seem to call one to do battle against them; but we are poor hands at the best. And yet——'

Robin did not conclude his sentence, and we walked back nearly as silently as we had come. His history of those first years of his boyhood gave me

a clue to many a trait of character and to many a line of conduct which hitherto I seemed only half to have understood. It made me comprehend the combination of intense determination with the thirsty drinking in of family affection, which met him openly for the first time when Alice ran down to welcome him on the hall-steps at Copsley. That time of home-training at Harmanbury would have been enough to make him grave and earnest and self-contained beyond his years, just as when we first knew him ; and I could imagine how lessons of self-reliance and steadfastness must have been burnt in upon his memory by such a night as that on the moors, and by his father's stern, final words of admonition following upon it.

Six years have passed away now since our walk by the river on that summer's afternoon, and Robert has been tolerably successful in the land of the giants. If ever any one, by mere force of determination, laid siege to, and carried off, honours, he, as we know at Copsley, has been that one ; taking them all—exhibitions, scholarship, fellowship, and prizes—just as if they were things by the way, the real battle lying on higher and further ground.

The highest ground ! I have not forgotten

his words a few months ago, when his name had come out first on the list of honours, and when I had been working his hand up and down for some time, with a motion analogous to that of pumping, as if by some such mechanism I might set the joy-bells ringing. 'I believe, Harry, your caring so much about it, and your people at home, too, is what gives me more pleasure than all the rest; but it's only outside show, after all—a toy victory, which children celebrate with flags and drums. The real work's before us both, and "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."' "

But I have been running on in a manner that I could never have anticipated; and my quire of paper has actually been filled, contrary to my expectations, and contrary, certainly, to Alice's. And as I look over these pages, I find myself under some anxiety concerning the betrayal of confidences, and pause to ask myself whether I have any right to give to the ears of the family the story of Robin's childhood, which, though it sounds rather like a printed book from my pen, is the substance exactly of what he told me that summer's day, six years ago, by the river. The censorship of the family press does not, fortunately, belong

to me; and the editors of these 'chronicles are welcome to cross out what they please; although I hold to it that all I have written is but a lawful dilution of the aphorism with which I was bidden to start, and a full exposition of the principle that '*I will* climbs to the top of the tree.'

At least Robin has proved it hitherto; although, for the first time in his life, I have heard him latterly throw out hints as to the uncertainty of success in reaching the prizes one most cares for, while his face has from time to time borne an aspect of suspense and anxiety.

Indeed, an atmosphere of mystery has during the last two months been creeping about the house in a manner altogether unprecedented, but which, however, seems at last to have found some satisfactory solution.

Why, yesterday, did all the members of the family shake hands on the stairs and in passages, without any particular or ostensible motive, but with a general idea of its being the right thing to do under the circumstances? And why did Robin come to my room to inform me, that for no earthly consideration would he exchange his lot for mine? upon which, never having asked him to do so, I told him he needn't mention it. And why was

Mrs. Martin heard publicly to observe to Mrs. Blackett, that Miss Alice's little flag wouldn't be amiss if it were put up again at the top of Mr. Robin's tree, as it was ten years ago : to which Mrs. Blackett made reply, that it would certainly not be amiss.

And why—— but I hear Alice's step on the passage, and a conviction reaches me that she is coming in, and will look over my shoulder; so that I may as well bring last words to a close before she withdraws these traitorous queries prematurely from my desk. No—she has stopped for a moment to speak to somebody outside; and I may safely wind up with a variation of Master Clarke's couplet, already memorialized in these pages:—

The day will come when Robin Adair
Shall win, and wed with, Alice the f——*

* *Notice from the Printer.*—MS. blotted and illegible.

IV.

Mrs. Blackett: her Story.

'WHO GOES A-MOTHERING FINDS VIOLETS IN THE LANE.'



MRS. BLACKETT : HER STORY.

*' Who goes a-mothering finds violets in the lane.' **

' WHO goes a-mothering finds violets in the lane!' That's what I said to our Miss Janie last Mid-lent Sunday ; and gave her a simnel cake, made Shropshire fashion, the day before, to offer to her mamma the first thing when she came down. And the next day they all—young ladies and gentlemen, and Miss Janie the first—came into my parlour. And 'Mrs. Blackett,' they said, 'what's going a-

* As far as is known to the writer, the old custom of going a-mothering has died out even in Shropshire and the adjacent counties ; but simnel cakes are still made and sold in some north-country neighbourhoods from Mid-lent to Easter.

mothering? and what's the meaning of Janie's simnel? and where are the violets?'

I was as pleased as possible to see them, as you may well believe, and begged them to please to be seated; but they said they couldn't stay only a few minutes.

'But it's a long telling, young ladies,' I said, 'and goes back to the days when I was young and in my old home, and to my mother's days before then. I wasn't seventeen when it came to be a saying among us on Mid-lent Sunday,—'Who goes a-mothering finds violets in the lane.'

'A new proverb for Georgie!' said Miss Mary, who is always ready with a notion, and comes out with it directly. 'I'd wait any time to hear it,' she said.

So I began to tell them as well as I could: but it seemed, what with their questionings and my answerings, to wind itself out into quite a history before I had done; and I had to beg their pardon many times, especially Master Harry's, who doesn't like sitting long, for having talked so fast.

'But do you know, Nursie,' said Miss Mary, (she calls me Nursie sometimes still), 'I think it's quite a beautiful story; and it ought to be written for Georgie's book, and I wish you would.'

‘But, my dear,’ I said, ‘it wouldn’t be the thing for my poor stories to be side-by-side with Miss Alice’s, or Mr. Harry’s, or any of yours. I’m scholar enough for downstairs; and I’m thankful to be permitted to keep the house-books and the washing-lists, and all, so that when I’m taken, there’ll not be any trouble the week after: but I’m no ways accustomed to writing page by page forward like—indeed I’ve a kind of notion, custom being, as the saying is, second nature, that if I were to try, somehow it would come out in receipts.’

They all laughed at me, Miss Mary particularly. ‘All the same, we’ll have your story for Georgie,’ she said, ‘and I’ll come down to your parlour, and write it while you tell it: only, mind you don’t miss out anything.’

‘I’d be quite agreeable, Miss Mary, my dear,’ I said, ‘only it’s hardly fit letting you have the trouble for an old woman’s tale like mine; and, indeed, I’m afraid that it would be a deal more weariness than you think: for when it comes to just talking, I don’t mind saying that I run on a bit more than is needful.’

‘All the better,’ said Miss Mary. ‘Why, Nursie, you’re just like a book of tracts, and fairy stories, and receipts, and moral tales, bound up in one, with a medical appendix at the end! They said I must

help to make up our proverb-book ; and I couldn't think of anything but "Birds of a feather flock together," and that's every one's property, even if I had anything to say about it ; which I haven't. But your going a-mothering is just the thing, and we two'll be partners in the concern.'

'I'll furnish a frontispiece,' said Mr. Harry, who had been busy with his pencil before my eyes ; and there, inside the cover of a sermon-book that was on the table from the day before, he had drawn a picture of me, with my spectacles in my hand and my best cap on, sitting in my chair by the fire ; while at the table, with a pen behind her ear, and looking, if you took her in one light, like a young clerk, and in the other like a pretty young lady as she is, sat Miss Mary ; and at the bottom was written, '*Well, Mrs. Blackett, and what next?*' Master Harry's wonderfully free with his pencil.

Of course, the end of it was that Miss Mary got her way ; and very kind and condescending she has been, bearing with my long rambling ways of telling a story, and often putting words for me a deal better than my own : though she says 'No.' It's at her bidding that I've made free to write these few lines at the beginning, which don't seem to me needful, but much like saying in a Will

that it's my own act and deed. Which I say accordingly.

* * * *

You'll say it's an odd wonderment of mine, Miss Mary, my dear; but I often find myself thinking how customs and old ways die out; and why they die, and where, and who's at the burying.

I know that there's one they say has gone by, even in Shropshire, my old home where it lasted the longest; and I'd have followed it to the grave as chief mourner if I was sure I hadn't done so already when we laid my poor mother in the churchyard at Woody Penriffe, where she and her mother before her had been born and brought up.

People say there's wrong in pride of family, and as a matter of course they're right in a measure, pride being ever a sin; and yet I shouldn't see any harm in your taking pleasure in having been Beverleys of Copsley for more than three hundred years; and, in the same way, I'll never deny that the Markitts of Penriffe in Shropshire held equally to tracing back from son to father, that had been for whole generations on the Ash Farm under Thorpe Hill.

Though, indeed, it was hardly to be called a farm, for acres don't grow with years; and it was

more a good-sized cottage, with a field or two for the cows and cart-pony, together with a sizeable piece of garden that was expected to have work on hand and something to show all the year round. One or more of us was always at it; for our mother seemed to think it was a sort of savings'-bank ordered by Providence for spare hours and over-energies: and as there were thirteen of us, besides my parents, it never wanted for care; and we'd have felt it a disgrace if, all the year round, there hadn't been a posy for my mother, and another for my father's button-hole for going to church on Sunday.

I couldn't tell you how we all got on as children; for it would be too long. I was the youngest in the family; and there were three brothers—Jem, and Aaron, and Joseph—older than me; and then Esther, and then four more girls, and the rest, lads; and I had been at my first place nigh upon a twelvemonth when I found the violets in the lane.

Madam Shaw, our Vicar's lady, got me the place; indeed, she kept all the girls of the village under her eye after they had left school, and knew as well as their own mothers what they were good for, and how they did their duty. My mother thought so highly of Madam Shaw, that she would never have dreamed of sending us anywhere to

service without her approval; and our village school was kept the strictest and the best in the county—at least, so the gentry said; and there were always places to be got by her girls in the farms, and even among the gentlefolk.

I was some way past fifteen when I left school; and my mother came up herself to bring me home (though it was only across the road), and to bid me return my thanks to the mistress for all favours, and promise to be a good girl and do my duty: and the next day there came down a message from the Vicarage to say I was to go up in the afternoon, as Madam Shaw had heard of a place for me with Mrs. Hart at the Ring Farm, three miles off.

‘Give my duty to Madam,’ said my mother, ‘and mind thy manners, Sally, to thank her for being so kind as to think of thee. And tell her,’ she added, ‘that I’ll make bold to come up and say the same myself if she’ll allow me; and that I hope thee’ll be a good lass.’

You may be sure I tried not to forget my mother’s instructions when I was shown into the lady’s parlour, and made my curtsy low, and felt that she was looking me over from my bonnet to my shoes, to see whether there had been time for any vanities to creep into my dress since the day

before when I had been in her school. She was a little brisk lady, with a will of her own, and a down-right kind heart too. But her eyes had a gift for seeing through and through, and finding out what was amiss before other folks would have had time to think about it; and if I had thought there was an untidy seam in my petticoat, or a stitch run in my stocking, I'd not have gone up before her with a clear conscience.

When I see young girls calling themselves servants, now-a-days, with white stockings, and flowers in their bonnets, and afraid of a heavy washing or a good day's work, with a baking in the middle, I find myself wishing them at Madam Shaw's school for a year, to learn what lasses may do. She always said that she'd never recommend one that couldn't bake and wash, and make and mend, fit for a palace; and that, let a girl take to finery, she washed her hands of her from that time forth. I believe that my mother would never have forgiven us if we had gone so far as to deserve a rebuke from the Vicar's lady; and, indeed, the only chastisement I ever received in my life was from her hands one day, when Madam had been in the school, and sent me home to tell my mother that I had been idling over my tasks, and talking in school, and deserved correction.

I felt, however, that I was ready to meet her eyes that day, while I begged pardon, and would she be pleased to accept some honey from our hive, which mother had sent with her duty and respects. My close straw bonnet had been plaited in the school, and the border was quite clean inside. Every stitch of my brown dress had been put in by myself, and I knew there was not a speck on the plain linen collar which I had stitched and got up that morning; so that I felt there was nothing that shouldn't be, when she said, 'Your mother's very good, Sally, and I make no doubt the Vicar'll fancy the honey mightily that's come from your bees.'

I made my curtsy again, and felt there was no little condescension in my being told in private that so great and learned a gentleman as the Vicar had a taste for honey; and then Madam Shaw began,—

'Mrs. Hart wants a girl, Sally; and if your mother approves, I'm going to send you there this day week.'

I knew what was expected of me, and said, 'I hoped I'd do my duty.'

'I hope so, Sally,' she said; 'and it will be well for you to say the Catechism as you go, and mind what it tells you. You'll have five pounds a-year, and if you get on well, there'll be half-a-crown

from the Vicar at Christmas; and I've said to Mrs. Hart that I'll answer for your bread being light, and the things a good colour from the wash: in which I hope you'll not disgrace your opportunities and bringing up.'

I said I humbly hoped not; and found myself going over directly in my mind, with a view to Mrs. Hart's caps, directions for clear-starching which were learnt by heart at Penriffle school, and which people may call old-fashioned now, though I've never found their like in any printed book, and that's fifty years ago, if it's a day.

Madam Shaw thought for a moment what should come next to prepare me for what she used to call 'going out into life,' which would sometimes make me ask myself, If we hadn't come into life when we were born, what had we been doing all along? Then she took me on various subjects, which was her custom always when sending the girls to service; 'because,' she said, 'fore-warned was fore-armed.'

It was something like this after she had fairly started:—

'Getting up in the morning, Sally?'

'Five o'clock summer; half-past five winter;
r, washing and baking days.'

‘Caps, Sally?’

‘Plain muslin, with hemmed frill, work-a-days; crimped tight. Net, close-fitting, with a ribbon, Sundays.

‘Gowns, Sally?’

‘Dark print—lilac best to wash—short sleeves, and made plain for work; no trimmings. Stuff, dark-blue or brown for afternoons, but short to the ankles. Lighter print in summer, with tight sleeves, for Sundays; and white apron.’

‘Bonnet, Sally?’

‘Plain straw, and over the face. Dark strings and plaited border; clean always.’

‘Fires, Sally?’

‘No waste. Sift cinders. A bright grate; no soot in the corners.’

‘Church, Sally?’

‘Never miss. Find out the places, and answer where it’s put to be answered. Never look about, or take notice of other folk!’

Then followed questions about washing and baking, after which Madam Shaw seemed satisfied. ‘You know the right,’ she said; ‘and mind, not only so, but always practise what you know. Keep to those principles, child, and you’ll bring no discredit on your parents or on your schooling. The Vicar will hear

you your Catechism on Sunday ; and we'll be glad to see your father and mother at the same time.'

Then, as was always her way when a girl at Penriffie went to service, she got up from her chair, and walked to a corner-cupboard, and got me a slice of cake ; telling me all the time how it was made, and how she hoped she might never have cause to regret her having cut it for me ; while I tried my best to say how unworthy I felt, but hoped I'd be a good girl, and give satisfaction.

There were no Sunday-schools in those days ; and Penriffie seemed always twenty years behind the oldest fashions ; so that I doubt whether there's one there yet. But the Vicar had catechizing in the church of an afternoon, after service ; and when a boy or girl 'went out into life,' as he called it, too, they said the Catechism to him, their father and mother and god-parents, if they were handy, being present. Then he generally gave them a Bible and Prayer-book, if they had got a good character at school. And, indeed, as I look back upon it, though neither he nor Madam talked overmuch of plans and systems, and what they did, I never knew a place from which a girl could go forth with such a feeling of being looked after and thought of for her good by her betters, or with such a

knowledge that, through its being made a serious matter of, the eyes of all the village were upon her.

My heart beat rather fast on Sunday after the Service, when the Vicar came down from the pulpit and bade the children stand in their places round the rails, and then said out loud,—‘Sarah Markitt, what is your name?’ Indeed it was a mercy that I didn’t come out with Sally Markitt instead of plain Sarah; for, from my parents being known and respected, all the neighbours stayed behind to hear me through, and nodded to each other when I got over the long bits without mistakes; while Madam Shaw in the Vicarage-pew kept time with her head, and said them through on her lips to make sure that I didn’t miss a word. Then she handed the Vicar a Bible and Prayer-book strongly bound, with my name written inside; and he called me up, and told me to read in them every day, and to fear God and honour the king, and obey my parents, and go to church. The last words he said were, ‘There’s everything in these for life, and there’s all in all for death; and you’ll not want them beyond.’

I have those books still; and it’s an odd fancy, but I never open them without seeming to catch a scent of the wind as it came up the hill from Penrifle valley on that Sunday afternoon, with

the breath of the clover and buttercups upon it; while the tall grass in the churchyard bent down before it all round us. And the picture always comes before me of the Vicar in his gown shaking hands with father and mother in the porch, and nodding to us children, and telling me again, as every one from my mother and Madam Shaw downward had done nothing but tell me the same, to mind to be a good girl, that my parents might take pride in me.

And when I look back on that day so long ago, and remember how the most of them are gone now, and lying under that very churchyard grass, I find myself thinking that there was a deal in those words of our Vicar's, which I seemed to put by in my heart with the scent of the clover, as I laid the books in my chest with a sprig of lavender between. 'They're everything for life, and all in all in death; and you'll not want them beyond:' as much, perhaps, as in finer sayings that are more thought of.

But Miss Mary, my dear, I take shame to myself for running on with all these old stories, and you writing so patient; and for all you tell me not to miss out anything, I feel that I should be getting on to tell you of the saying which you were pleased to ask about for Miss Janie.

Mrs. Hart, my new mistress, was a sharp woman, and a striving one. I've thought she'd have done for an officer in the army, if she'd been a man: as it was, she ruled the house in a manner which was surprising, considering—if we count Mr. Hart, and the farm-woman and the farming-men—what a many she had under her. I have her picture now before me, as she went up and down from dairy to attic, scolding every one that wasn't doing exactly as she expected at the moment, and even the cat and dogs if they'd made a litter, or scratched the carpet.

As a matter of management, I don't hold to a mistress always scolding, Miss Mary. My mother used to say, 'Never use a sixpenny word when a threepenny one will do;' and I think scolding comes more expensive in the end, and, after all, doesn't get more done than a tight hand with a pleasant way: indeed I've been inclined to think, hardly so much. It seems to me like there always being a high wind, and no quiet between; and although a stiff breeze is good now and then to clear the air, and tidy up the sky when the clouds have got in a litter about it, yet it's thought of more, and does more good, coming once a-week than all the day.

I had often to feel very thankful to Madam

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Shaw for all the training she had thought fit to give me; for Mrs. Hart seemed to have her spectacles on for everything wrong, and to have lost them for what was done without fault. I've since reflected how well it was that I began with a hard-working place. Dairy, washing, baking, cleaning, scouring, cooking, all seemed to come one upon another until the day was done; and if work wasn't well done, and the rooms without a speck of dust, and the furniture like looking-glasses, I might wait for my dinner till they were. If town-girls now-a-days could go to the Ring Farm, as it used to be, for a year or two, we shouldn't hear so much of three being wanted to take the work of one.

I didn't see my mother for six months after I had been at my place. 'Service is service, lass,' she had said when I left her; 'and thy time's thy mistress's now. I don't hold to backwards and forwards when a girl's got to make her way and do her duty: so mind thee's not to be thinking of coming home the first time thee gets into the dumps. If thee's bad, thee canst send word by the carrier, and I'll send back a herb draught that'll put thee right again.' So it was not till Christmas that I got a day's leave, and went over home, right glad of a holiday.

‘Thee’s looking brave, lass,’ said my father, as I came in out of the frosty air, my cheeks all of a glow.

‘One need be for Christmas, father,’ I said, kissing him and my mother, and all the rest that were at home.

‘I’ll be bound thy mistress gives thee a good name,’ he said; ‘thee doesn’t let the grass grow under thy feet from the looks of thee.’

‘I haven’t a chance to,’ I said, somewhat crossly; ‘it’s work all day, from morning till night, up there.’

My mother put on her spectacles, and looked me through and through.

‘What’s the matter, Sally?’ she asked, after a minute.

‘Nothing, mother,’ I said; ‘only I’d like a bit of pleasuring oftener, and less to do.’

‘Is thee off thy food, lass?’

‘No, mother; I eat hearty, and there’s always a plenty.’

‘Is thee off thy sleep, lass?’

‘No, mother; I’m fast before I’m well laid down in bed; from nine o’clock to near on five.’

‘Thee isn’t off thy legs,’ she said, thinking to herself out loud, ‘or thee wouldn’t be here now.’

Tell thee what, lass, if thee isn't off thy victuals, nor off thy sleep, nor off thy legs, thee must be a bit off thy head; and thee'd best go up to Madam Shaw, and ask her to please to find thee a place as lady, to have other folks wait on thee and thy carriage to the door, that thee shouldn't have to tire thyself putting down thy feet to the ground.'

My mother's word was always much held by amongst us all; and I know I felt so ashamed of myself before her, that I could hardly look up for a while. And as I went home that night, my brother Joe seeing me through the fields into the lane, I made a resolution that I'd make the best of a good place where I learnt my duty, and where my mistress, if she was sharp and strict, looked after me to see that I got into no bad ways of work, or otherwise.

It was pretty nigh on three months after, that I got leave to go over home for Mothering Sunday; my mistress going so far as to bid me tell my mother that I was a steady lass, and might turn out a working-woman yet. I was pleased enough, and thankful to Mrs. Hart when she gave me that message to take; for it was a wonderful deal for her to say; as she held that praise was more likely

even than pleasuring to turn the girls' heads. And indeed by this time, through striving to do my work well, and to gain an insight into why things were done this way or that, I had come to take such an interest in it all, that I wouldn't lightly have given up my place for any other; and though I feared my mistress, I'd have worked day and night for her good word.

But you'll want to know about Mothering Sunday, Miss Mary. It's died out now, they tell me, even in Shropshire; and indeed it was kept up in our family, as far as I know, when most other folks had lost thought about it. But our mother's family were Deepdens, that had lived as long on the country-side as the Markitts; and all the old ways of the other times were handed down amongst them: and I can remember, when I was younger than our Miss Janie, how my mother took me along with her down Penriffle hill to my grandmother Deepden, when she went a-mothering herself.

It was the old fashion, then, on the fourth Sunday in Lent, for all of a family that could by any means attain to it, to go and see their mother, and bring her a simnel cake, made spicy with saffron and a hard crust, or some other gift, to show duty and affection. There were only two of

the lads at home that year ; all the rest being married, or out in service at one place or another in the neighbourhood ; but I knew I should see all my brothers and sisters that day, for they'd have walked ten miles rather than miss going to see mother : Jack, even, from Shrewsbury, which was fourteen miles off, taking a holiday, and coming over to Penrifle in time for church.

Esther had made the simnel cake last year, and it was my turn now ; for, being so many of us, one made the cake, and the rest gave anything else they had thought to get ready for our mother against Mid-lent Sunday.

My mistress seemed to take quite a pride in seeing that mine should be of the richest and the best ; saying, as she gave me out flour and saffron, and eggs and candy, with many other good things,—‘Thy mother’s brought up her family for some use, Sally, and not to sit with their hands before them ; and though spice and candy’s not to be got for nought, they’re nothing more than is suitable when feelings of duty and gratitude are mixed in along with them, as they should be with thee. And I’d be the first to let thee know of it, and chastise thee too, for all thou think’st thyself a woman by this time, if I see’d thee, that’s had her

example always before thee, getting into good-for-nought ways, and letting thy gowns about thy heels, or gossiping with the farm-lads when thee should be at thy work and minding thy duty.'

I was hard at work on Friday, pounding and chopping, and mixing things for my simnel ; keeping time with the chopper to a rhyme my mother used to say over the making :—

' She who would a simnel make,
Flour and saffron first must shake,
Candy, spices, eggs must take,
Chop and pound till arms do ache :
Then must boil, and then must bake
For a crust too hard to break.

When at Mid-lent thou dost wake,
To thy mother bear thy cake :
She will prize it for thy sake.'

I reckon you'd find few simnels all through Shropshire, Miss Mary, with a harder crust—for that's one of the principal things—or better flavoured than mine was, when it came out of the oven as yellow as gold on Saturday ; and I took some pride in showing it to my mistress, who let me put it on the supper-table for the rest to see when they came in at night. To make them right they should be well raised, first boiled and then baked,

and the crust like a wall all round, and shaped up and down for ornament.

I was up betimes the next morning to get through what cleaning and washing-up had to be done on Sunday; and that was no more than was necessary, for Mrs. Hart was willing to send us all regularly to church, though she was always too busy to go herself.

Then I dressed myself, and brushed back my hair under my bonnet—the same that Madam Shaw had seen to before I came away—and got out my Sunday print—a lavender sprig on a white ground—which I had taken out and washed up the week before: and I fastened down my cape over it with a knot of lavender ribbon that my master had given me in the autumn, to wear at harvest-home supper, and afterwards on Sunday afternoons.

When I was dressed and tidy, I took my Prayer-book, and my basket with the cake in it folded in a napkin; and by nine o'clock I had wished Mrs. Hart good day, and was off for my own home.

‘Mind thee’s back again before dark,’ I heard her call after me; ‘and no loitering and dawdling on the way, or thee’ll pay for it afterwards.’

I thought, as I went off down the garden walk, why it was that my mistress seemed to fancy I’d

never find my way without showing; and a bit of pride came over me as I said to myself that I was well on past sixteen, and as tall as twenty, and knew pretty much how to behave myself without its being taken for granted that I'd go wrong unless I was put right: but, with the weight of the simnel cake hanging on my arm, I couldn't keep up my pride long, and put it away, supposing her words must be all for my good, which was often my comfort when she was extra sharp.

That's what's said to us women over all the disagreeable things in life, I think, Miss Mary; from taking physic and being scolded at one's work, to one's last illness. Of course there's truth in it; but not the whole truth. I think it's to be said over one's pleasant days, and joyful meetings, and happy Sundays, and merry Christmases. They're for our good, too; and all the beautiful things which God has put into the world for His creatures to love and praise Him for, are as much for our good as the sorrows and the cares, let folks say what they will.

Something like this was in my mind on that Sunday morning at the end of March, as I went down the hill, and crossed the fields to Penriffe brook.

It was as warm and fine as if summer had let

out a day to the spring beforehand, just to keep Mid-lent Sunday with; and the blackbirds and thrushes seemed to me to know that their good time was coming, and to be singing, 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful.' Then the young lambs were bleating up and down the meadows, and racing back from where they had strayed to the dams who were calling after them; and I thought to myself that they, too, were going a-mothering, and wondered if they felt as light-hearted as I. And the primroses were out fresh from the last night's rain, and looking like nests of sunbeams; and tufts of early wood-anemones were peeping up in sheltered places, half open, as if they weren't fixed in their minds as to whether they should wait still or come out directly. Then the tender grass of the meadows had the breakfast-dew on it still; while the trees and bushes up each side of the hills seemed to be trying which would come out first.

I stayed for a minute on the bridge over Penrifle brook, for I think any one must be in a very great hurry that doesn't stop on a bridge to look over: and I thought, as I heard how full and deep the water was, that it sounded like the flutes for the psalms the birds were singing on Sunday morning; and

that the black-cap, with his black wig and low note like a silver bell, was the clerk.

You'll think me very particular, Miss Mary, in bringing out all my fancies of that morning; and, indeed, you'd do better, when I run off into such things, to stop writing, and take me up again at a sensible place. But I've sometimes thought that at some one time—it may be when the spring of one's youth meets the spring of the year—there's an awaking to a sort of other life—to seeing the places that one has known all one's days in a different light, more beautiful than before; and as I stood that day on the bridge over Penrifle brook, and looked up the hill I had come down, which was in the shadow, and then up Penrifle ridge which lay before me all a-glow with the sunshine, there came a sort of bound into my heart like something saying, 'I'm young and I'm blithe, and the world's beautiful, and one's life's good to have; and God is a Father and loves the works of His hands, and I seem to love Him different from ever before—not because I've been taught it in the Catechism, and told to love Him—but because—because He's good and cares for me, and for all the things He has made.'

I hadn't too much time to stay; and I was

beginning to climb up the lane which winds up the hill for a mile before it brings you to our village, when I bethought me that the violets would be well out on the banks, and that I'd bring some to mother for a posy; and I was bending down to gather them, with my basket on the ground by my side, when I heard some one come whistling over the stile close by me, and a voice saying, 'Who goes a-mothering finds violets in the lane.'

You may be sure I looked up in a hurry; and there was Tom Blackett, our clerk's son, in his Sunday clothes, taking up my basket to carry for me, and looking almost as if he had been watching for my coming, though I felt it half wrong to think so.

'Good morning, Sally,' he said; 'I'm just in time to carry thy basket; and I reckon thy simnel cake's a good weight.'

'Good morning, Tom,' I answered, thinking what I should do; for the lane went exactly by Madam Shaw's windows: 'but don't trouble; for thou'rt right about its being heavy.'

'I'd be lighter carrying ought for thee, Sally,' he said, 'than if I'd nothing at all in my hands; and thee's so bonny, Sally,' he went on, looking at me from head to foot, 'thee's come out like a bit of spring thyself.'

I won't deny that I liked to hear Tom's mind about my looks ; though I pretended to believe he didn't mean what he said, and was quite taken up with tying my violets together with leaves all round them. We had been school-fellows, we two, when Tom was the eldest in the school, and I was among the younger ones ; and though Madam Shaw and Mrs. Hart between them would have put away from us any such dangers as the likelihood of a walk together up Penrifle lane, he had let me know more than once that he thought more of me than I guessed—not by words exactly—but there, my dear, I hardly know how—for these things at first can't somehow be written down, but come like the scent of flowers on the wind, that won't do to be put into a smelling-bottle.

'Do thee like violets so ?' he asked, as we walked on, as nearly side-by-side as my conscience would allow.

'They're good to see and to smell to,' I said, thinking of something else.

'I'll bring thee a posy, then, every Sunday,' said Tom, brightly : 'I'll warrant thou'lt have violets to wear after every one thinks the last is gone.'

'No, don't, Tom,' I said, anxiously ; 'I don't

think I ought. I'm afraid, even now, we'll have Madam Shaw looking after us.'

'And what's Madam Shaw got to say against me bringing thee violets? They're not hers.'

'I don't know exactly, Tom,' I faltered; 'but she wouldn't approve. She says I'm to have nought to do with such as thee.'

'Such as *me!*' said Tom, proudly, and raising himself up to his full height: 'what's against me?'

He might well ask; for every one knew him to be the best scholar and the best son in the parish; and I know I wasn't the only one to think him the bravest looking.

'Nought against thee in particular, Tom,' I replied; 'but thee knows thee's a lad.'

'Yes,' said Tom, slowly, 'yes, I'm a lad—there's no denying that; and what's more, Sally,' he added, 'I wouldn't be nought else, thee being a lass.'

I was thinking over that speech of his, and all that seemed to be intended by it, when he began again:—'Madam Shaw thinks a great deal of the Catechism, and is always preaching it in the village; I wish she'd ask thee what's the first thing in my duty to my neighbour.'

'It's to love him as myself, Tom,' I said, without thinking for a moment what he meant.

‘That’s it exactly, Sally,’ he went on, with a chuckle in his voice; ‘and I’m thy neighbour—next door almost—and that’s what I want thee to do for me; and it must be right when it’s in the Catechism. And listen to me, Sally; I’m better than Catechism, I love thee more than myself—a sight more.’

I couldn’t see that there was any fault in the way Tom put it, and he seemed so pleased with what he had said that I wouldn’t try to find out if it was wrong or not: indeed, to say the truth, I didn’t mislike his reasoning. But, all the same, I felt freer to speak when he pretended to peep into my basket to see the cake.

‘I made it Friday,’ I said; ‘it’s my turn this year: hast thee ever tasted our simnels, Tom?’

‘I wasn’t thinking of the taste, Sally,’ he answered, looking full at me; ‘I was thinking thee’d been a good daughter, and that things must go well with thee, as it says in the commandment with promise.’

Of course I could only say that it would be a shame if I were anything else, when my mother had striven for us so hard; and that I wasn’t a better daughter than he was a son.

‘I was thinking that of thee when I saw thee gathering the violets,’ he went on to say. ‘I knew

they were for thy mother. I thought thy life always should be like that if I could make it so, having flowers in it instead of thorns. That's what I meant when I spoke to thee, Sally.'

'It sounded almost like a printed book, Tom,' I answered, 'and is too good a deal for me.'

'Do thee think it's like a book, Sally?' he said, looking up quite pleased. 'Nay, but I've a bit of real poetry for thee, that I found in one of father's old books but a little ago. It was written by one they called John Herrick, and I learnt it off on purpose for thee :—

" I'll for thee a simnel bring
'Gainst thou go a-mothering ;
So that when she blesses thee, -
Half that blessing thou'lt give me."

'Do thee like that, Sally?'

'Yes, Tom,' I said, 'it sounds finely; but for kindness' sake, Tom, take the path by the meadow, and leave me to come alone up the road: we'll be in the village at the next turn.' And I took the basket out of his hand.

'Will thee give me thy violets if I do?' he asked, boldly; and, in fear of Madam seeing us, I gave them.

'Good-bye then for now, Sally,' he said, 'if thee

will have it so; but I'll look out for thee going home in the evening:' and as he jumped over the stile, with my posy in his button-hole, I, with a troubled feeling in my mind—and yet not altogether a troubled one—turned the road, and saw Madam Shaw standing at the gate of the Vicarage.

'Going a-mothering, Sally?' she was pleased to ask, as I curtsied low to her.

'Yes, please ma'am,' I answered; thinking to myself whether she would take me to task for my lavender breast-knot.

'And how's Mrs. Hart, Sally?'

'Finely, ma'am, I thank you,' I said, curtseying again.

'I hope you've got her good word, Sally, for being up betimes and first at your work. I reckon there are few sharper mistresses in the country-side than you've got, to keep you in all those things you ought to know, and a lass had need to be stirring and steady to gain it.'

I felt it was not for me to say that I had a good character to take to my mother from my mistress, as Madam Shaw had taught us all our lives that only the vain and shiftless speak well of themselves; so I stood still until she should bid me go on. I don't think any girls now-a-days, Miss Mary,

seem to have the respect taught them for their betters that we were expected to show at Penriffle to those that were over us. It almost takes my breath sometimes to think what 'madam, or my mother, would have thought of the lasses in other parts, who seem to think themselves as good as their mistresses, with always a word to say for themselves, and with a toss of their heads very different from the way we were expected to stand when we were spoken to.

Madam was condescending enough to look at my simnel-cake in the basket; and she was pleased to say that it was not badly made, which was great praise from her; while I all the time thought of Tom, and felt I didn't deserve she should notice me; for there had been only the turn of the road between her and us two together.

I was last of us all at our house; and indeed it was quite a sight to see—though I shouldn't say it—when all of us thirteen, with Aaron's wife that made one more, came up one by one to mother in her chair, each with our present, and got her blessing. I've not told you what my mother was like; and indeed, I should find it hard to picture her as she sat that day like a queen, in her black gown, with her snowy lawn handkerchief folded over her

bosom, and a clear bit of colour on her cheeks, and her white hair lying like silk under a muslin cap that looked even whiter than snow. She was near about sixty-five at that time; but her eyes were as clear and bright as ever, and her figure as upright; and there was a sort of a state about her that morning, as we all stood up together before her, that became her well, and seemed only fitting for her on Mid-lent Sunday.

Our father stood beside her like a king-consort, as they call it; and with a pride in her over and above his part in us. He was tall, too, and brave to see, in his blue coat with large buttons that he always wore on Sundays; but he was a deal slower in his ways than mother, and always deferred to her judgment. On this day in the year he seemed as if he only had such part in us as she was pleased to leave him; and kept on saying every five minutes that we were to try and take copy from her who had done so much for us all.

The table was quite full when I took out my simnel-cake, and laid it down before her. Jane and Molly and Betsy, that were married, had brought eggs, and a quarter of lamb, and a knitted shawl; and Esther had got ready a pair of spring chickens; and Phoebe from Hartop, a china shepherdess;

and the lads had some bits of carpentering; and Jack had brought a cambric kerchief, the finest in Shrewsbury, and he said that wasn't fine enough; and then, when all the presents were given, we had enough to say to each other—the most of us only meeting now once a-year.

Then the bells began to ring, and we all prepared to go to church. But first, according to custom—and oh, my dear, how customs die out!—the bowl of furmety was brought, and we all drank round, and wished our mother might see many a Mid-lent to come. Furmety is made of wheat-grains, boiled in sweet milk, and well spiced and sugared; and the taste of it now would bring me to Shropshire in spirit, and to the time when we drank it then all together, as we had done ever since I can remember when Mothering Sunday came round.

The neighbours stood to see us pass; for it wasn't often that so many of one family were seen going up the church path together. Father and mother walked first, arm-in-arm; he carrying her books, and she looking stately and pleased—God having prospered her in her family, and not a living being in the world that could say a disrespectful word against her. Then came Jane and Jack; and
 , and Susan his wife; and then all the

rest of us, two and two—Joe and I, who always stuck together, being the last, as was proper for the youngest.

‘It feels quite queer, Sally,’ he said, as we walked along. ‘I can’t make up my mind whether it’s going a-burying or going a-marrying it feels like : but it’s one or t’other of them.’

I am afraid that my thoughts just then were most of going a-marrying ; for as we went into church, there was Tom Blackett in the front of the singing-gallery, with my violets in his button-hole, and looking right down on me, as I sat finding out what were the lessons in my Prayer-book.

There was a deal thought of the singing in our church ; and I felt glad and happy to worship there again, after so many Sundays in my master’s pew at Ring, where there was an organ with twenty-five tunes, instead of a band like ours, which always seemed to me like praising by machine instead of praising with one’s heart straight up to heaven. It never felt to me like home there ; and our Vicar’s sermons were twice as long as Mr. Sharpe’s at Ring, as if he wouldn’t stint when it came to giving us what was for our good : and though I didn’t always attend right through, yet, one sermon being much like another, I had mostly been able to take

my place in the catechizing afterwards. My mother used to say that the Vicar's sermons were like good loaves all of one baking—so good and so like there was never anything to choose between them; and that if we lived as he taught us we should never fail to do well.

It was the twenty-seventh morning of the month; and my father, putting on his spectacles, found the places for mother in the large Prayer-book, just as if he couldn't show her enough respect; and then looked over with her as they said the verses together, never missing a word right through the Service. I don't know that ever the Psalms seemed to come so to my heart as they did that day, though it's wonderful always to observe how they fall just to suit one's different times and seasons in life; and as I stood up with Joe at the end of the pew, and the words were read,—‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help,’ and, ‘The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, even for evermore,’ and, ‘They that trust in the Lord shall be even as the Mount Zion, which may not be removed, but standeth fast for ever,’ and then looked up to where father and mother stood reading out of the same book, and thought how many years they had

trusted and stood fast, there came the sort of flood into my heart that I had felt in the morning on the bridge—and I don't know whether what had passed after mayn't have had something to do with its being fuller even than then—and I seemed to feel all my life and strength going into the 'Glory be to the Father' which came down from the gallery, Tom Blackett's voice sounding in, deeper and truer than all the rest.

They didn't use their instruments until the psalm for singing was given out ; and there was generally a few minutes allowed for tuning and trying the notes before, in which people settled themselves a bit, and coughed, and blew their noses, and the Vicar took a pinch of snuff. Then the flageolets and flutes, and one or two violins, sounded a note together to show that they were ready, and the clerk—that was Tom's father—gave out the first line.

It was always the same on Mid-lent Sunday ; and I had found it in my Prayer-book before it was read out, all ready to sing with Joe, who, at other times, sat with my two older brothers that were at home, in the gallery—most of our family being partial to music. It was the 128th Psalm ; and as we stood up and went through the verses, it seemed to me as if my father and mother

had sat for their pictures in each one, and that everybody in the church must be thinking so, as I dare say they were. And it came to me powerfully how God's own word honours God-fearing, honest labour and family religion, as you'll see runs all through ; and a sort of pride came to me to think of belonging to such as they.

I couldn't go on now without repeating it, Miss Mary, for I learnt it to myself afterwards ; and often's the time that I say it over, as I look at my parents' pictures, cut out there in black on the wall, and remember the blessing that's promised for the seed of the righteous :—

'The man is blest who fears the Lord,
Nor only worship pays,
But keeps his steps confin'd with care
To his appointed ways.

He shall upon the sweet returns
Of his own labour feed ;
Without dependence live, and see
His wishes all succeed.

His wife, like a fair fertile vine,
Her lovely fruit shall bring ;
His children, like young olive plants,
About his table spring.

Who fears the Lord shall prosper thus ;
Him Sion's God shall bless,

And grant him all his days to see
Jerusalem's success.

He shall live on, till heirs from him
Descend with vast increase ;
Much bless'd in his own prosp'rous state,
And more in Israel's peace.'

They sang it to an old tune that Joe told me was called St. Ann's, and it seemed just suited for it; and as the last words were sung, I caught the sound of Tom's flageolet, soft and sweet, dying away with the flutes in the words about 'Israel's peace;' and a verse came to my mind that I had learnt out of the Testament at school,—'As many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.' And I thought that 'Israel's peace' meant the happiness of all God-fearing people who walked according to His rule; and that my father and mother, singing there together in their old age, as they had done when they were young, with such quiet calm faces, were exactly what the psalm meant to me; and better than any teaching about it, even though it should be the Vicar's own.

I won't deny that during sermon-time my thoughts went after my violets, and I considered what I should do about Tom. I remembered well

what Madam Shaw had taught me about such things; and her words, 'Have nought to do with them; but if they *will*, tell father,' came to my mind almost like a commandment. One thing I was sure of—I'd rather have seen my posy where it was than anywhere else; and I had always thought I'd never marry any one that hadn't as kind a heart, and as good an education, and as much scholaring as Tom Blackett.

There was a deal of shaking of hands outside in the churchyard among old friends and neighbours from different parts, and especially among young folk that had, like ourselves, come a-mothering on Mid-lent Sunday; and all the men took off their hats, and all the women curtsied, as the Vicar and Madam came down the walk, and nodded and smiled to every one. Joe and I were together, holding the gate open to let them pass; and the Vicar stopped to tell me that I was quite a woman now, and looked as fresh as a rose; which made me blush redder still, for I saw Tom was behind, and in hearing.

Mother and Esther had quite a feast for us at home—all cold, though, except potatoes; for there'd never have been an end of it if any one had thought to stay behind for Sunday cooking;

and we all drank her health and father's, and our duty to them, and then my father spoke a few words to us, which were pretty much like this :—

‘Lads and lasses, we ’re glad, right glad, to see ye all—mother and me is both. And, thank God’—and here he bowed his head like at the place in the Creed—‘thank God, you ’re good sons and daughters, and have never brought a disgrace on the old home where ye were born and bred ; and I trust in Him ye never will. I ’m an old man, and mother, though she’s as bonnie to see—aye, bonnier—than any of ye, why mother’s not so young as she was when Jack was the only one of ye here, and brought her a posy of my gathering in his hand on Mothering Sunday, when he wasn’t a year old. And, lads and lasses, we love ye all well, better than we can tell ; and there’s not a night that we don’t ask God to keep ye one and all—from Jack off at Shrewsbury to our youngest lass here,’ and he laid his hand on my head as he spoke : ‘and He’s true to His word, and we know He will, as He has kept us. But, as I was saying, I ’m an old man, and mayn’t be here next Mid-lent when ye come up to see mother ; but ye ’ll remember that there’s nothing ye can do that ’ll be enough for her who ’s striven and toiled

to bring ye up as ye are. Love one another, and your husbands and wives—those of ye that have got such—but remember your mother before all. And when we're both together in the churchyard—and something tells me that when one's there the other won't be long after—when we're both in Penriffé churchyard, I say, never forget that ye had a mother such as yours, even as it says in the Book of wisdom, “Her children arise up and call her blessed, and the heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.”’

Nobody said anything for a moment when my father had finished speaking; and then they all stood up—those great, big brothers of mine, with their sun-burnt faces and strong looks, and we, too, and said,—‘God bless our father and mother, and spare them long!’ And after that my simnel-cake was cut, and handed round, and praised by every one for the best that was ever made.

Then they squandered about in the garden and fields, with a sort of Sunday-rest and holiday-pleasure feeling; and my brothers, some of them, went to where the cows were at pasture; and my sisters talked together, and with mother, about their children, and how they were getting on; and father went out to the gate, and I after him.

'Well, lass,' he said, 'thee looks young to have such a grey-headed father as I am; thee looks more like my grand-child, for all thee's grown tall of late.'

'I've summut to say to thee, father,' I said.

'Speak up, lass,' he replied; 'no matter what thee's got to say. Is it that thee's got more work than thee likes, as 'twas at Christmas?'

'No, father; it's not that,' I answered, rather ashamed; 'I've a deal to do, but I'm strong and well.'

My father looked at me all over quite slowly, and thinking over my words. Then he said, after a moment, with a thought coming to his mind, 'It's lads, Sally; I do believe it's lads; and thee was in thy cradle it seems but yesterday.'

I got quite red and confused when he guessed right; but I remembered Tom's intention of walking back with me that evening, and I was fixed in my mind that it should be fair and open, and with my parents' leave.

'I wouldn't say nought to him, father, till I'd told thee,' I said, somewhat shyly.

'Who's *he*, lass?' answered my father, thoughtfully: 'there's a deal—pretty nigh all—depends on who's he.'

‘He’s better than me, father,’ I went on saying; ‘mother, even, ’ll have nought to fault me with about him. It’s Tom Blackett, that carried my basket up the hill this morning.’

‘Tom!’ said my father, looking down at me half unbelieving; ‘Tom Blackett! why he was in t’other cradle, and that was yesterday, too.’

‘He’s past twenty-one,’ I said, ‘and I’m nigh on seventeen; and I wouldn’t so much as promise to walk with him without thee, father, and mother, knowing.’

‘Dost like him, lass?’ he asked, after a minute, in which I pulled two primroses to pieces.

‘Yes, father, I like him well,’ I answered; ‘I’d never like another to compare with him.’

‘Has thee told thy mother, lass?’

‘No, father,’ I said; ‘thee must tell her for me. She’ll say it’ll make my bread heavy, and the washing a bad colour; but it won’t. When the heart’s light, father, the bread’s light.’

‘She were a lass herself when I went courting,’ he said; thinking out loud. ‘She were uncommon hard to get; but she were worth waiting for, even if it had been seven years.’

‘Thee’ll tell mother,’ I said, coaxing him a bit, and wanting to get it over.

Well, the end of it was, Miss Mary, that mother consented to Tom's coming in—for he was hanging about to be ready in case of being wanted—and that she talked till the bells rang again for church to us both about being too young and giddy; and that Tom was never to come about the Ring Farm unknown to Mrs. Hart, which was the same as saying he'd never come at all; and that we were never to walk together without leave; and that we weren't to think of anything beyond walking together, no matter how old we fancied ourselves, for years to come; and Tom promised everything, while all the time I saw that mother'd rather have had him care for me than any lad in Penriffe. And when he told her how he'd be as good as a son to her and father from that time—just like paying in advance—and when she took him by the hand, and said at last, 'Bless thee, lad!' he looked all smiling at me, and said, 'It's what I told thee in the lane, Sally,—

“ So that when she blesses thee,
Half thy blessing thou'lt give me ! ”

I didn't mind looking up by accident at Tom once that afternoon, as he sat in the gallery, so happy and proud; and I thought to myself all

the time the Vicar was reading about Joseph and his brethren, that one reason why the Bible is the best book is because family love, and crying for joy and sorrow, and hopes and fears, are all in it, exactly as they are to the end of the world; and all seem understood there and by Him whose Book it is. And when the blessing was said, with 'The peace of God which passeth all understanding' in it, I was crying to myself with a sort of tears that I had never known before; and I'm not sure that I didn't feel safest and happiest in their coming there in God's house, which He always means to feel like home to His children; while I thought that, if even I couldn't understand them myself, He could.

It wasn't Joe that walked back with me that evening, carrying my basket; though he'd counted to do it, and told Tom he wouldn't have given up to another than he. And as we came near the Vicarage-gate, Tom laughed to himself, and said, 'Shall I go over by the field, and meet thee lower down, Sally? Thee was uncommon shy this morning; but now thee don't seem so scared to see Madam at the gate. I reckon she can't take thee to task now thy parents have sent me along with thee.'

‘No, Tom,’ I said ; ‘I’m not frightened now for Madam ; but she’s taught me for my good always, and it was minding what she said that got thee leave to walk with me, and made me tell father. I’d never have walked with thee, Tom, unbeknownst to him and mother ;’ and it’s my experience, Miss Mary, my dear, that the more we think of father and mother, the more other folks think of us.

He wished me good-night when we got to the meadows on the other side of the river where we could see the farm—that is to say, where the farm could see us ; for I felt as if I’d got something in my heart that was too secret and sweet to be shown to all the world ; and I wouldn’t let him come further. And he showed me the violets in his button-hole, as we went our ways ; and said, ‘I’ll never give them up, Sally ; but I’ll keep them when they’re dead and withered, for love of thee.’

I needn’t say that my mind was as full as possible while I went up the field-path alone, and tried to think it was only that morning I had come down with my simnel-cake for mother, years younger than I felt now. It was just past sunset ; and the sky down in the west was all full of glory colours, and the birds that had been singing the morning psalms were asleep now, and the lambs

quiet, and the flowers shut : but on and on in my ears went the sound of Tom's flute, dying away softly over 'Israel's peace,' and there seemed to be a sort of music in my heart to it that Sunday evening, which went on all the way full and quiet-like, till my mistress, seeing me coming, called out from the door,—'How thee dawdles, Sally ! Look alive, lass, and take off thy finery, and carry out the wash for the pigs !'

The time went on, one day pretty much like another as far as hard-working went ; and I didn't get a chance to go home again for months, and shouldn't have dared to ask it after a whole holiday in the spring.

I used often to think what a difference there was between Mrs. Hart and my mother, though it would have been hard to say which was the strivingest : but it seemed to me that mother kept her work under her like a queen, and wouldn't be a servant to it, while my mistress was a slave to all that was to be got through. Mother always called the seasons according to the work God was doing outside over the land. With her it was lambing season, and blossoming, and harvest, and seed-time, unless it was Easter, or Whitsuntide, or Christmas : but Mrs. Hart's calendar was quite

a different kind, and even the months had no names for her ; but the year seemed like a great wheel going round with pig-killing time, and curing time, and pickling time, and preserving time, and catsup time, and brewing and wine-making times, turning up one upon another ; and the weeks at Ring Farm were just made up of baking-day, washing-day, ironing-day, cleaning-day, and so on—Sunday often seeming in her eyes quite a mistake in the week, if anything particular was on hand that wanted to be got done.

Mother used to say, ‘the heavier the work, the least noise ;’ and I remember well her standing out with me in our garden one day, looking all down the valley when the harvest was ripe, and saying, ‘Look a-down, lass, on all that the Lord’s hand is doing over the earth. It’s grand to think that when the sun comes out of his chambers, and when the blossoms and the fruit and the corn and all are brought forth, it’s all wrought so still, and no one hears Him doing ; and it makes one feel it the more like a kind of a Presence, when, as it says in the Psalms, the storms are for His chariot, and He goeth on the wings of the wind. I think it’s a lesson to them that He’s put here to do their duty in the state of life to which it has pleased Him to call

them, showing them that His way is to work *still*, whether it's in the earth or on the souls of men; and that their duties are done best to please Him when there's the most thought over them, and the least noise.'

But, as I was saying, the weeks and the months went on; and I had seen Tom to speak to only once or twice—the last time being at harvest-home supper—till Christmas was near at hand, and the snow thick on the ground.

I was fast asleep one night, having gone to bed at eight o'clock to be up before five the next morning, when, nigh about twelve, I heard my master's voice at the foot of the stair, calling me to come down directly, for my mistress was ill. I had my shawl round me in a moment, and was down at the door directly, he meeting me in the passage.

'I'm going off for the doctor, lass,' he said, with a deal of fright in his voice; 'thee go in and stay with her. She's as bad as bad; and I don't know what's to come of it.'

When I got in, I found Mrs. Hart moaning in bed, with a pain in her breast that she said was fit to strangle her. 'I'm mortal bad, Sally,' she said, 'and I can't catch my breath;' and, indeed, it was a

struggle for her to speak a word, even when I lifted her up in bed.

‘Keep up, missus,’ I said, ‘and let me fetch you a drop of something warm; there’s ashes hot, covered up in the grate: anyhow the flint and steel’s handy.’

‘Do, lass, and make haste!’ she said moaning: ‘but don’t thee leave me long—I’m mortal ill; and oh dear, it was pig-killing to-morrow!’

‘Try and get the pig off your mind, missus; I said; ‘I’ll do just as if you was about—I’ll not leave a bit of the curing to any one else.’ For, poor soul! I knew she’d be worrying herself worse than anything about the work left to itself.

Well, I got her the drink, and tried to comfort her; but I didn’t like her looks, or her feeling so cold, and went down again to heat a brick for her feet, and to get another blanket.

‘Sally,’ she said, when I came up, ‘I’m struck for death: I know it. A coffin flew out of the fire right to my feet, when all the rest were at church last Sunday; and the dog’s been howling as it has never howled since the night my mother died, here in this very room; and it’s not only pig-killing to-morrow, there’s all the things for the mince-pies got ready down in the keeping-cupboard, and—

stay, lass! did thee hear? did thee hear? It's the owl-screech! Then it's all over with me! O may the Lord have mercy on me!

Of course I did my best to comfort her, and told her that mother didn't believe much in death-signs, and that nought could happen that wasn't appointed: but she only shook her head and seemed to give herself up in a kind of doze; while I stood by her thinking what a long time it must be before my master could be back with the doctor from five miles off. After about half-an-hour she looked up in an anxious kind of way, and said, 'There's a key in my box there, Sally; that's the key of the press out on the landing. There's a Bible in it somewhere, that my mother used to read in Sundays, and when there was a burying: thee'll find it under the cookery-book and linen that's folded near the bottom—that is, as near as I can mind; there's jams on the top shelf, and pickles next, and catsup and herbs,' she went on to herself: 'yes, it's the lowest of all; and mind thee don't touch nought else. If I am to die,' I heard her say, 'I'd best have a bit of what's good for dying on.'

I went out to bring down my own Bible that the Vicar had given me, trembling all over for fear

she wouldn't last till master came, and wishing I could send down the field to where the farm-woman and her daughter lived at the gate. Ah, Miss Mary! how often I've thought to myself that it's too much one's own danger—that our hearts are prone to be like my poor mistress's press; the jams and the pickles and the best linen at the top, and the Bible under the cookery-book, 'most forgotten at the bottom.

'Hast found it, lass?' she said, as well as she could; for the hard breathing had come on again.

'I've brought my own, missus,' I answered: 'there's nought touched in the press.'

This seemed to give her the least bit of relief, as I knew it would; and I opened my Bible and said, 'Where shall I read?'

'Anywhere,' she said: 'how should I know what's right? Thee's had scholaring, and thee's been a good lass to me; and I'll trust thee for the curing and the salting, so that thee promises to see that there's no waste of——'

'Don't think of that, missus,' I said, for it frightened me to see how she struggled to breathe, let alone speaking: 'I'll see to it. Hear a bit of comfort out of the Bible.'

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘the dog’s howled, and the owl’s screeched : it’s time thee should begin.’

Well, I began with the 15th of St. Luke, which I opened upon; but I had only read a few verses when she took up my words in a rambling sort of way, that showed me she was past attending. It was like this she went :—‘ Ah, yes ! that lost piece of silver, it was a shilling—years ago. I know I shall find it in the parlour some day, for all they say it’s fallen through the boards. Sweep diligently. O dear ! it’s never time to sweep it again yet ! But it’s in the parlour they’ll come when I’m laid out ; and who’ll tell them to clean their boots ? And the bit of carpet’s there, that was only laid down last Shrewsbury show. Promise me, Sally—and she stared round at me till I could have screamed—promise me thee’ll see to it when they’ve got the coffin out of the house ; and wipe up the table they’ve put the mugs on. Do thee mind, lass / or am I always to be at thy heels ? It’s strive, strive, day and night, and there’s no good ever comes of——.’ But here her voice seemed notable to struggle up against the choking ; and I, who had taken a sort of comfort in her having begun a cold-ing way, which seemed more life-like than before, tried to support her to get her breath, though I

was trembling all over. It didn't last longer than two or three minutes. Then the struggling ceased ; and after a little, I saw that my poor mistress was dead.

I wouldn't for all the world go back over that night, when I was alone there with that poor woman fighting with death, and not a bit of rest, even to the last, for all the toiling life she had set before her. Yet I wouldn't but have had that lesson before my eyes just when I was young and everything before me. I've often thought it was meant to save me from getting into such a way of being taken up with the world's strife and cares as should keep me from thinking beyond the world ; and with the sound of those last words, 'It's strive, strive, day and night, and there's no good,' which had come from her poor unconscious lips, ringing in my ears, my eyes fell upon the Bible our good Vicar had given me ; and I thought of his words—'There's everything in them for life, and all in all for death ;' and then—why I fell to crying, and to going down on my knees by my poor dead mistress, to ask God to come near to me ; for I was dreadfully lonely and shivering and frightened on that cold night.

At last the doctor and my master came in.

He said it was something wrong at the heart that had killed her; and we tried to comfort my poor master as well as we could.

It was with a heavy heart that I went about my work the next day, and those that came after. I tried to do all just as she would have wished; but I had got so accustomed to being looked after, and in a general way put about, that my spirits sank quite low; and when my mother herself came up to see me, I fell on her neck and cried like a baby—she comforting me all the time, and telling me that Mrs. Hart had sent her word by the carrier, only a week before, that I was a good lass, and should go home at Christmas if she could spare me: which was some comfort to think of.

Master, too, went about the house quite in a low way; and I was often sorry that I had given my word that the pig should be killed all the same, and had told him so. For the next day he *would* see after it himself, saying,—‘She’d have given me words, Sally, if I hadn’t. Don’t thee think so?’ And what was I to say but ‘Yes, master, she would.’ But every time there was pork, or bacon, or ham, for a month (for I kept my promise about the salting and curing), he would look at me with

the knife in his hand, and say, 'Was this *the* pig, lass?' before he cut it; and I couldn't but tell the truth; and then he'd get quite to talk despairingly about what a good wife she'd been. 'A man's inclined to think that he'd rather have a quiet tongue with a wife, and few words,' he said to me one day (it was over pork-chops, which I hoped he wouldn't notice—but he did), 'and I got a notion of that sort myself into my head after we'd been married. But it's wonderful how one gets used to the other—and now I misses it. I feel like this now, lass,' he went on; 'when the day's done I feel as if I hadn't got my due—I feel scarce an honest man—I feel as if I had *ought* to be taken up and set down, and showed I was a fool, and asked what I was good for, a dozen times in the day, and as if I had got out of it some way as wasn't honourable. It quite lies on my mind, it does'—that's the way he said it—'and I seem to look for it at every turn; and, tell thee what, lass, I wouldn't mind if thee was just to give me a word now and then, sharp and short—thee remembers how it was her way—I'd take it kind in thee, and thou wast always a kind lass, if thee would. It'd feel more as it ought to be than now, when there's not a woman that seems to think she's got a right to take me to task.'

Do you know, Miss Mary, I felt such a kind of pity for the poor man that I'd have done anything for him—anything but what he asked me; and yet, when I was thinking over his words, I couldn't help putting it to myself whether Tom would ever be coming to any one with a trouble like that after I was gone, and I thought I'd ask him: but I didn't.

I went home at Christmas, never to come back to Ring Farm, as neither mother nor Madam Shaw approved of my staying where there wasn't a mistress; and I was glad to be home, for I'd got a sort of a turn that cold night when poor Mrs. Hart died; and felt low-spirited, and dull, and no appetite. My master gave me a handsome present when I came away; and bade me promise to let him know if ever I was married, that he might send over the best off his farm for the occasion. He was well looked after, they said, after I was gone, by his wife's sister, who told him that she was coming to live with him, and keep things going; and folks said she'd got much of a tongue like her sister's, so that he had every chance of being pretty well talked to.

That Christmas-time at home with father and mother did a great deal for me. Tom was getting on so fast, where he had gone near Shrewsbury, to

learn something of surveying and a higher style of farming than was carried on about us, that I determined I wouldn't let him find me just a farm-girl and nothing more; and, though we hadn't many books at home beyond the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Saint's Rest*, and Taylor's *Golden Grove*, and father's farming and gardening books, Tom's father, who was schoolmaster as well as clerk, gave me a helping hand, and the Vicar, himself, condescended to lend me one or two books out of his library, and I gave a deal of thought to improving myself, and to learning from mother many things that she hadn't shown me before, and many a maxim and thought about life that have stayed in my mind ever since like golden words. The work was not heavy, now that Esther and me were together; and as there was sheet-turning to be done, we'd sit round the fire in the long evenings, and father'd throw on the fresh logs, and my brothers would sing with us as we sewed, while some of my elder sisters, with their children, would look in now and then in the daytime, or make me go out to see them at their homes.

The days had already begun to lengthen, when Madam Shaw sent for me up to the Vicarage, as she'd done before, and told me she'd heard of

another place for me. 'It's a long way off, Sally,' she said, 'even beyond London; and there's scarce a girl in Penrifle that's ever had a chance to go so far and see as much; but you did your duty with Mrs. Hart; and if your parents and you think well of it, I'll give it you.'

Then she went on to tell me how there was a lady's housekeeper in Kent that had a cousin in London, that had once had a Penrifle girl from Madam Shaw's school; and the lady in Kent wished for another such, and would see to her being trained for a first-rate cook, so that she could be sure of her being striving and willing, and keeping her place. 'I've heard say,' continued Madam, 'that there's girls down in those parts that think themselves as good as their betters, and will gossip with the lads over the fence when they should be hanging out the clothes, and all such like; so no wonder they hold to a lass being worth sending for that's been taught to mind her place, and hasn't got notions of answering again, and trailing her gowns behind her; which, as the Vicar has said more than once—and I hope he'll put it in a sermon some day where it'll join in with the rest—are ways that, if carried out, would end in the overthrowing of Church and State.'

It almost overcame me to think that one might come to that; and I made bold to say so to Madam, who took my words very kindly, and said, that she was sure I wouldn't get to such a pass.

Her way of speaking to me now was quite different from when I went out first, on which occasion she felt it her duty to go through with me sharp and particular in the regular form, more making sure that I'd go wrong without she kept me right, than thinking that I might try and keep on well for my duty's sake and my parents'. I've read in one of Mr. George's books of how, when sailors in a ship cross the line for the first time, those that are in with them lead them a troubled life by tarring them, and rasping, and scraping, and sousing them; calling it some observance for the honour of Neptune. But it's done once for all; and they may cross over and over, and never have rough handling any more; and as I remember about my preparations for starting from home for the second time, I've sometimes thought it was something of that principle with Madam, and that, having taken me round sharply upon clothes, and lads, and catechism, at first, she trusted me for them after. Mother had told her, too, about Tom, which made me rather shy of meeting her when I knew she'd heard it; but I was com-

forted to find that she'd said back to mother that lads and lasses *would* be at that work some day, just as children would have measles and chicken-pox; and it was everything that it should come out openly, although we try to keep them from the infection. And so, she was pleased to say, it had come out directly with Tom and me; and so long as we didn't talk of marrying, which must be years off, she thought there couldn't be two steadier to walk together, and she hoped we'd do well.

I can't go over all that last time at Penrifle, Miss Mary, though I'm an old woman now, and looking to see those that I left there, in a land where we shall never part more; for I never came back to it as my home again, and my place at the last will be here in Copsley churchyard, hundreds of miles from where I was born, and where they're the most of them laid to rest. But one's laid here that makes it home to me; as it says, 'Where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried.'

There was a great talking over of my prospects in the village, and among all our family; and Joe stood out about my going so far; and father and mother, I could see, were down-hearted when we came home from the Vicarage, after they had gone up to look at the place on the map, and, as father

said, took in at a glance how large the world was, and that even Shrewsbury didn't cut much of a figure among all the rest of the great places—let alone Penrifle. My heart, too, was heavy, for I had gone up to tea there with Madam's Betsy; and afterwards they had had me into the parlour; and the Vicar had given me his good wishes, and some advice on to them about remembering the guides of my youth; and Madam gave me a book for pasting in receipts, and showed me, in her own handwriting at the beginning, that famous one of hers for elder wine: and that finished me off quite; and I forgot about my manners; and cried like a baby, and seized hold of her hand, and kissed it over and over, and hoped she'd pardon me if ever I had been a trouble to her, and I'd think of her and the Vicar always at my prayers, and never could enough. And she—dear, good lady!—had the tears in her eyes, too, and said,—'Sally, Sally lass, don't take on now;' and seemed to find a refuge in the words she'd said to us so often before, and which lived at the top of her tongue,—'Do thy duty in that state of life to which it's pleased God to call thee.'

But, as I was saying, that night—father and mother having come up to fetch me—we were all down-spirited; for they always called me the child

of their old age, that had come so long after all the rest; and they seemed to grieve at my being so far off, away from them. And I cried again, and said I'd give it up; and I'm inclined to think father'd have taken me at my word, if mother hadn't said it was a leading of Providence, and that if we turned from the way that was put before us, we couldn't expect a blessing. Esther, she said, was at home, and that was enough; and it was clear that it would be a rise for me, who, being the youngest of thirteen, must make my own way in the world. 'And the same Lord'll be over thee and us, child,' she said, the morning I went away, and fell on her neck and father's, turn about; 'and it'll be a comfort to me on Sundays in church, when the psalms and lessons are read, and the prayers, to think thee's hearing the same blessed words, and that thy thoughts will be with us where thou wast christened, and where, please God, thee'll be married yet.' She threw in those words to cheer me up a bit with a thought of home again; and when she and father had blessed me over and over, and my brothers and sisters kissed me all round, Joe took up my box, and put it in his barrow, and we went down the hill, leaving Penriffie behind, to where the Shrewsbury coach would pass by, two miles further on.

The first violet of the spring was out in the lane, just where the turn was across the bridge to Ring Farm; and I gathered it, and put it by afterwards in my Prayer-book, at the 128th Psalm; and, Miss Mary, it's there still, just as Tom's words about violets in the lane are in my heart till I die.

I wouldn't look back, for I misdoubted myself sorely; but after Joe had seen me on the coach, and wished me good-bye—even he having a choke in his voice—and after we had gone on two or three miles in the February sunshine, some one near said, 'That's Penriffe spire on the hill.' And I looked up, for all my resolutions, and there it was, pointing up to heaven; and I knew that father and mother were praying God to keep me, just where the shadow falls; and it seemed to be showing me the way for my prayers for them to go—a sort of last message from home, where I kept fancying everything going on as usual, and myself away from them all; and then I was so blinded I saw nothing more.

I'm inclined to think that the first great parting in life stretches one's heart so that nothing ever quite comes up to it again; and I felt as if mine would break, more especially when the guard

played on his horn some of the airs my brothers and I used to sing, and "Home, sweet home," among them. But Tom met me at Shrewsbury, and Jack; and they saw me on to the London coach; and Tom said he loved me better than ever, and that he was getting on grandly, and thought of finding a place as land-steward on a gentleman's estate a few years hence. 'And don't thee lose heart, Sally,' he said; 'for going across London isn't going out of the world; and I'd find thee out if thee *was* going out of the world, I love thee so; and when I'm set up in my line, we'll make one, and they'll say everywhere I've got the best wife in all England.'

This was a great easing to my mind, hearing Tom speak so cheerfully; for it seemed to me as if I had had partings enough for a year, let alone one morning. 'And I'll write to thee, Sally,' he said; 'I reckon thee'll be pleased to get a letter all to thyself.'

'But, Tom,' I said, 'it's one-and-tenpence to pay, and thee hasn't too much money.' And what do you think he answered me, Miss Mary? 'Well, lass, and if it was one *pound* ten, I'm not sure whether I wouldn't think twice before I'd give up going to thee if thy heart was set on't;' which

words, spoken as we drove off—the horn sounding and the guard blowing, and the ostler calling ‘All right!’ like the old family coach in the game—quite gave me a feeling all over lest Tom should take to squandering his money; although I’m not sure that I didn’t like to have what he had said to turn over again and put away in my mind.

I often think of that long journey of mine—the first I ever made; and how I wondered to think the world should be so big; and how cold it was; and how kind the guard was, who, being a Shropshire man, let me go inside whenever there was a place empty, which was the most part of the way; while I kept thinking that every town larger than Shrewsbury must be London, and told him so: at which he laughed very much; and I couldn’t help having a sort of pride—not for myself but for Madam Shaw’s school—that any one should think it worth while to send so far for a Penrifle girl.

Travelling was travelling then, Miss Mary. That’s what I said to myself last year, when I went up to London from Copsley in two hours, to see Joe’s son and his wife, that have the nursery-grounds at Camberwell. ‘How little one thinks in youth,’ I said, ‘of what we shall come to see in age!’ And, having half-an-hour to wait for the up-train, I

looked round the walls of the station-platform, and they seemed quite a study, and what our Vicar used to call food for meditation. You mayn't see much, having been born to it, in what brought those feelings into my mind; but as I studied 'Colman's Mustard,' and 'Stevenson's Teas,' and 'Mappin's Cutlery,' with the prices given, and very reasonable, and 'Heal's Bedstead, sent free by post,' and 'Thorley's Food for Cattle,' and 'Borwick's Baking-powder,' finishing up with the 'Sydenham Trousers at 16s. 6d.,' it almost brought the tears to my eyes to compare things now with what they was in my first journey from home, and to think of a railway train running, as they tell me it does, right up Penrifle valley.

I was met in London by the cousin of the house-keeper that had engaged me—the same who had once had a Penrifle girl herself. 'I knew you in a moment for Sarah Markitt,' she said, as we walked away from the office, leaving a porter to carry my trunk: 'your bonnet's the pattern, and your cloak's the cut exactly of the girl I had out of Madam Shaw's school ten years ago; and if you turn out a second Susan Allen, I shan't have done Mrs. Jones of Copsley a bad turn in telling her where to look for a kitchen-maid. Why, Susan saved her tra-

velling-money, by thrift and management, before she'd been six months under me : and the girls before wasted their wages twice over, and never seemed to think they wern't obliging me by looking after their work, if they did attend to it at all.'

I stayed a whole day and night in London by Mrs. Jones' desire, under whom I was to be at Copsley ; for one of the laundry-maids was to call for me the day but one after, that had come up to see her family, and was to take me down with her into Kent. Mrs. Dennis, who had charge of me, and the other servants in the house, were very friendly, and took me to see London town and many grand places ; and they laughed at me in a good-natured sort of way because I said of everything that I admired that it was grander than Shrewsbury show ; and because, whenever I looked at a crowd of people going along, I thought that something had happened, and that there was an accident.

What chiefly struck me were the Houses of Parliament, where, they told me, the laws were made, and the king himself came, with a crown and sceptre like in the Book of Esther. I could hardly believe as I saw the throne, that I was looking at the place where he sat whom the Vicar always was telling us to honour and obey, and who had always stood

before my mind as something too great really to be seen and come near to. I wondered whether there was a housemaid to the House of Lords, to dust the seats and shake out the cushions; and how she felt when she dusted the king's throne—for I noticed that dust had dared to settle on it like anything else. And then I remembered a bit of one of our sermons at Penrifle, that I used to say by heart at the catechizing, and that Madam Shaw used to nod her head at to show that she thought well of it; and it was just like this:—‘My friends, the monarch and the peasant alike are mortal; the grave enfolds them both, and alike they turn to ashes. Upon them the sun shines equally, and upon them the storms of life must fall. The most exalted throne is not exempt from the cares and dust of life's highway.’ And this being called to my mind, I said it to my companions, as showing how our Vicar at Penrifle had known all about it; and they nodded their heads at each other, evidently thinking how learned he must be.

Yes, they were very kind to me; but yet, in the midst of all the grand sights, I felt more lonely than ever in my life before. They all spoke so differently to home, and it was never ‘How's thee, lass?’ but ‘How do you do, Sarah?’ And then I

felt I looked different in my Penriffe dress from the Londoners; and whatever I saw that surprised me I was always saying to myself, 'If only mother could see that!' or 'Tom would call that a sight worth looking at!' And then I remembered the miles I was away from them; and once, seeing a coach pass by, all yellow and red, like that I had come in, I felt as if I must stop it, and ask the guard to leave word at Jack's that I was there and all well; but they laughed at me, and said that there were hundreds of coaches just like that, and that that one was going as far one way as Shrewsbury was the other. Ah, my dear, we've many responsibilities to answer for since penny postage has come in!

I was called for the next day, and felt quite low at leaving Mrs. Dennis, that had been so good to me. She took me into her parlour, and spoke very kindly, giving me buttered toast and good advice one after another: and her mistress coming in—a very grand lady all silks and lace, like a peeress in a picture-book—she named me to her while I made my curtsy, and said, 'It's the girl from Shropshire, that your ladyship said might stop with me on her way to Mrs. Beverley at Copsley. She's come from the same school as Susan Allen that married

from us last year.' And for all we had been taught to think so much of those above us, I should hardly have known, except for Mrs. Dennis saying it, that I was listening to a ladyship, when she stopped very graciously, and said, 'I know Mrs. Dennis has taken good care of you, and I hope you'll get on well at Copsley, Sarah. Susan was quite a favourite here ; so you see Penriffé girls are getting a name among us for good servants.'

Upon which I thought nothing but about the familiar name ; and said, quite straight out, that I offered my respectful duty and thanks to her ladyship and Mrs. Dennis for all their kindness, and hoped I might prove deserving of it : and as her ladyship went out, Mrs. Dennis said it was plain I had been taught how to speak ; and I said I thought it was in the Catechism so plain that one couldn't help seeing it, to order ourselves lowly and reverently to all our betters, and that Madam Shaw was always reminding us of it.

We went in another yellow and red coach down to the cross-roads, from which the lane to Copsley branches off—the laundry-maid and I ; but she said very little beyond observing it was a deal of trouble having to get me such a way off, but it was just like one of Mrs. Jones' whims. I felt she was

put out with me; and, indeed, I learned afterwards that she had had words with Mrs. Jones, who wouldn't consent to taking her niece in my place, who, Mrs. Jones said, was too much of a fine lady for her.

Well, Miss Mary, I needn't tell you what sort of a place I found Copsley Hall. I was struck with the grandeur of it, as compared with anything that I had ever seen before; and Mrs. Jones, who was a very particular woman, made me kindly welcome, and, after a day or two, seeing my ways of work and my dress, was pleased to say that Mrs. Dennis had done her a good turn in telling her where to go for a servant, and that she wished there were more Madam Shaws to keep up the training of kitchen-maids and housemaids, for that they seemed harder to find good than chimneys that wouldn't smoke.

Your grandpapa and grandmamma were getting into middle life then; and there were the three children—Master Wilfred, that was the heir; and Master Harry, that's your own father; and Miss Fanny, that married Mr. Adairson. I always loved children; and though my place was in the kitchen, I often had Miss Fanny, that was nine years old, and the youngest, with me, telling me about her toys, and hearing tales of Shropshire ways, and playing as

I taught her, with the animals out of Noah's ark, at Shrewsbury show, which was a great amusement.

That first night, however, amongst all the strange servants, and seeing ways that I wasn't accustomed to, my heart failed me many times ; more especially when the laundry-maid asked me, at supper, if I didn't belong to the Quakers—which I knew was meant for my plain brown dress and close net cap—and set a laugh going at me. But when she went on to say, 'Thee had best go to bed if thee's tired,' meaning it for sport, it sounded so like Penriffe speech that I had much ado to keep up till I got out on the stairs, when I gave way altogether.

I was going to bed in the little top-attic that was to be my own room, and was sitting on my box with a sort of affection for the one thing that had come from home, and had been in Joe's barrow, and handed on to the coach by Tom himself, when my eye fell on an old bit of newspaper that was in the drawer for my clothes, and I saw it was the list of deaths in a number of the *Chronicle*, a year old. I shouldn't have troubled to do more than put it straightways, if it hadn't been for the word servant that caught my eye ; and all carelessly I read :—
' *On the 4th inst., at Piccadilly, Mrs. Joan Fervis,*

for fifty years a faithful servant and friend in the family of James Lewis, Esq. She lived respected and died lamented.' Well, I sat still on my box, but my thoughts took quite a different turn. I thought to myself who Mrs. Joan Jervis might be, and who James Lewis, Esquire, might be; and of that I knew nothing: but, from that, I put it to myself what a deal there was summed up in fifty years of faithful servitude! How many bakings and washings, not to mention pickling and preserving seasons; how many good times and cross-going times; how many christenings and marryings; and what a thing to have said of her, that she was friend as well as servant, and lived respected, and died lamented! Miss Mary, my dear, I shall never know anything more of Mrs. Joan Jervis in this world; but I'd like to thank her for what she did for me that first night of my being a lonely kitchen-maid in the top-attic, sitting on my box. For this is how I put it,—'Sally,' I said, 'thee's at the beginning now, and thee may be sure that Mrs. Joan Jervis had *her* beginning. Thee may depend, that 'faithful friend and servant' wasn't got the first year, nor the second, nor the fifth; and perhaps she was away from all that she had known, there in Piccadilly, and began as kitchen-maid, and cried, sitting on *her*

box. Well, she must have got up on a sort of ladder made up of every-days, to her eminence at the last—for all getting on must be of that sort; and—there it comes—why shouldn't thee be another Mrs. Joan Jervis, and live respected and die lamented? Why shouldn't thee begin it to-morrow? why shouldn't thee have it over thee that thou wast a faithful friend and servant here, in this very house? Thee's got will, and thee's got good bringing-up, and thee's got health, and thee's thy mother's prayers and thy father's. Sally, thee *shall* !'

And with this I got up, with a kind of a spirit quite longing for the morrow, that I might ascend the first round of the ladder of every-days; and the only thing I couldn't settle that night before I fell asleep was where Tom was to fit in, or how, being his wife, I could all the same be for fifty years a faithful servant and friend in the family of Wilfred Beverley, Esquire, and live respected and die lamented.

It's almost like taking a liberty to be telling you of your own family and forefathers, Miss Mary; and it will be in every way more becoming that I should keep most to my own story, which you are still good enough to attend to. And of

that it's enough to say, that though my life wasn't without it's trials, still, thanks to my former teaching and to Mrs. Jones' instructions, I worked my way up in three years to be what she was pleased to call 'too good for a kitchen-maid,' and equal to taking the chief part of the cooking under her; to say nothing of overlooking the dairy-work.

All that time I saw but little of my master and mistress, who were somewhat high in their ways; though Mrs. Beverley herself was of a sorrowful spirit, and cast down by many a little mischance which a stronger person wouldn't have thought of. All the management of the house was left in Mrs. Jones' hands, and so couldn't have been better; and truly thankful I felt, knowing the difference, to be under one that was always willing to acknowledge one's efforts, and yet so particular to see that everything was done right.

Meantime, I heard from home once, if not twice, every year; and Tom kept to his word, telling me how much work he was doing, and how hard he was striving to fit himself for the time when he'd be able to give me a home of my own. It didn't unsettle me at all in my feelings when he wrote that way, for we were both content to wait for that time, it having been put before us so

all along; and marrying in our rank of life's as different from what it is in yours, Miss Mary, where it's all roses thrown on the path and flower-arches overhead, as potatoes and vegetable-marrows are different from those very flowers: and as I come to think of it, the last would be very suitable, if they could be put up any way for folks in our line of life, who've got to earn their living by their own hands, and to think of the kitchen-gardens more than the flower-gardens all through.

At the end of the third year of my being at Copsley—or, rather, nearer the middle of the fourth—I had a letter from Esther, telling me that Madam Shaw was dead; and when I got that, I seemed to think I'd never known trouble before. I thought and thought of all her words, and her teachings, and her heart-care for us all; and every little sharp way she had came soft now, like through a mist of tears, which seemed even to blot out that receipt for elder wine that she had written for me from my sight, as I tried to read it over in memory of her that was gone. I couldn't give my mind to my work that day, and so I said to Mrs. Jones. 'Short paste and whipped cream are beyond me to-day, ma'am,' I said; 'and jugged hare and boiled leg of mutton seem that distracted from my

mind, that I'd not be answerable for caper-sauce going up with the first, and currant jelly being served with the joint.' And she was as feeling for me as if she'd been my own mother; and told me she knew what it was to lose a friend; and that I might ease my mind of the dinner, even to the third course, and that she'd look to it all herself.

I know you'll believe me when I tell you that I went to my own little room alone, and opened my box, and took out everything that reminded me of her—my work-basket, that she had seen to herself, and my oldest bonnet, that she had approved of as regarded the plaiting, and my sampler, made every stitch according to her rules, down to the very knitting-needles that I had learnt stockings on at school; and then I tried to fancy Penriffe without its best friend, and every one at the funeral; and I cried and cried not to have been better and more grateful to one who had been so good to me: over and above that it made me feel, coming so suddenly, that my hold on all that I loved was very shaken and uncertain.

There was a sort of comfort to me in putting a black ribbon over that very oldest bonnet, and in wearing it for her sake; and the next Sunday I went through the Catechism in memory of her,

which I thought, if she had known it, would have been the tribute she'd have prized most; and the familiar words brought Penriffe and home and our church so present to me, that I could almost have fancied, when I shut my eyes, that I was there again, under the ash-tree in the school-garden, waiting to open the gate and let her pass.

Mrs. Jones, seeing my sorrow, was a kind friend to me, saying that she should try for me to get a holiday in the spring and go down home; for that, though she didn't hold to girls needing to run off directly they were home-sick, she thought three years' steady work should meet with a little favouring. 'But mind, Sarah,' she said, 'I'm not going to lose you for many a year to come; and you may tell Tom Blackett from me that he must wait till I give him leave to take you: for I'm not so young as I was, and a good servant's not to be got by crossing the road. I'll send cousin Dennis a box of my best preserves when I have the opportunity, as testifying to her friendly act in helping me to a girl that had learnt her duty.' And I hope you'll excuse my repeating these her words, Miss Mary, which seems almost unbecoming to do so; but I can't help remembering how, after the great bound that my heart gave at

thoughts of going home, there came a lesser throb of pleasure and humble thankfulness that I was getting on a little in the footsteps of Mrs. Joan Jervis, and was, if I might venture to think so, in the beginning of the way to live respected and die lamented.

But I was to be home sooner than the spring. My heart beat as if it would come out of me when a letter was brought me three weeks later, the postman sounding his horn as gay as possible, and never seeming to think what might be inside. I was sure it was something bad ; for I had never heard more than twice in six months at the most ; and the sight of father's hand-writing, large and feeble, gave me quite a turn.

This was the letter :—

‘DEAR DAUGHTER,

‘I write these few lines to tell thee that thy mother's ill, and we'd be glad thee should come home, thy mistress permitting. It don't seem fever, and it don't seem nought that's violent-like. But her strength's going so fast she can't leave her chair, and the doctor says it mayn't be long.

‘She took Madam's death very quiet, but it

struck inwards, I think, as this does with me. She talks of thee, dear lass, day and night, and sometimes in her sleep. Last night she thought thee was little again, and I heard her toying with thee as she'd done more than twenty years ago, when thee was given to us after all the rest; and she lifted up her voice in a low way, and sang to thee one of the songs that she had used thee to, which was like this,—“The soldier must fight and the sailor must roam; but rest, little baby—with mother's thy home.” And then I saw she was moving her foot up and down, as though she was rocking the cradle, and was minded to write to thee to-day.

‘The Lord keep thee, dear lass, in all thy ways, and in perils by land, if such should be on thy journey. We shan't think it hard if thee can't come, for all we want thee so; as those that are over thee may find it hard to spare thee. But I know thee will if possible, and my duty to them: and if ought should be owing on account of thy coming away, let it be set to my account, and I will repay it.

‘I am my dear lass's loving father,

‘DAVID MARKITT.

‘*The Ash Farm, Penrifle, Shropshire.*’

I read that letter through once, Miss Mary, and then the next time, and it was burnt into my heart for all my life afterwards. And then I didn't say a word, but went straight into Mrs. Jones' parlour—the same that's my own now—and laid it down before her, and couldn't speak still. She was mixing for jelly by the fire; but there was something in my way, she said afterwards, that was beyond jelly, though that's particular; and she fumbled for her spectacles all in a hurry, saying, over and over, 'What is it, Sarah? What is it?' while I kept looking at her without answering.

And such was her kindness and feeling, that half-an-hour wasn't over before I was dressed, and a thing or two put up in my bag, and I at the cross-roads waiting for the coach to London, which, it so happened, went by that morning; and it came round to me after, though never from her, that the jelly she took always a pride in, was spoiled while she saw after my going off directly. I've often thought since that it was well I'd had a breaking in to rough ways with Mrs. Hart; for Mrs. Jones by this time had used me so to having a friend with her, that I'd have felt the contrary too much coming after.

There was rain and November mist all that

long long journey home ; but there was a comfort in feeling that every turn of the wheels brought me on as fast as I could go ; and I read father's letter over and over till I knew it by heart, thinking all the time how much trouble it must have cost him to write it, as he was but little of a scholar, and had nothing beyond the Bible and the *Gardener's Calendar* for his books, which made me feel its words all the more.

There was no one to meet me at Shrewsbury, when I changed coaches ; and my heart sank low at not seeing Jack, for I was afraid he must have been sent for home, as was indeed the truth ; and I hardly dared to listen to what was said by the passengers, for fear bad news might come to me from strange lips ; though I needn't have feared, for the world wasn't Penrifle to every one.

And there, where Joe had left me nearly four years before, the coach left me then ; and I took up my little bag in my hand, and, O Miss Mary, I didn't want any one to show me the way ! The rain and mist were over, but the weather was just like when a person that's been crying in a temper has done with tears, and takes to the sulks—a dark, angry day, with a grey sky and a cold cutting wind, and the ground sodden with fallen leaves,

and the hills as if they were too shy to show their faces, and all gloomy and foreboding like, as seemed fit to keep company with my heart.

I walked on as fast as I could, looking out all the way for some one to tell me news of home : but there wasn't any one about, until I came into the lane where the turn is off to Ring, and which, as I have told you before, Miss Mary, leads up straight past the Vicarage into the village. And there at the stile—the very stile over which he had come that Mid-lent Sunday long ago—was Tom Blackett, standing grave and quiet, and—for I marked it in a moment—with a bunch of autumn violets in his hand. He was with his hand in mine, and my bag on his arm, in a moment, and drew me to him quite close, for we had never arm-in-armed before ; and I said, 'Tom, tell me, what of mother?'

I knew it all in a moment when he spoke, for it was in his voice as he said, 'Sally, I came down this way on the chance to meet thee first, for I knew thee'd come up from thy parts as soon as thee could ;' and then he stopped for a moment, while I squeezed his arm to go on. 'Thee was such a good daughter to her, Sally ; she always said so ; and it'll be only to give thee back to her

after this world's done, that I'll take thee, and care for thee; and maybe she's looking down upon us now.'

It was all told then, and I hardly remember anything of all the walk up the hill but the one cry from my heart of 'Mother, mother!'

Tom didn't say much to me—he knew better; but as we came past the Vicarage, and near to our own home, he put his violets in my hand and said, 'Thee gave me thine that were gathered for her once, Sally; and I got these on the chance of meeting thee to-day; they're the last of the autumn. And Sally, love,' he went on, 'she sent for me, and left thy blessing with me, and bid me tell thee so.'

And it all came to my mind, that day long ago in the spring-time when I went a-mothering; and the words Tom had said,—

'So that when she blesses thee,
Half thy blessing thou 'lt give me.'

And I thought I was going a-mothering for the last time, now in the dark November day; and the violets and the shared blessing now, came up before me with the remembrance of the violets and shared blessing then; and I couldn't look on any further

into my life, but just to a longing beyond it to see mother again.

Esther was the first to meet me at the door; and inside were Joe and Jane and Jack, and ever so many more: but I hardly looked at them for the desire I had to get to father. 'Where's father, Esther?' I said; and she answered, 'Upstairs. Would thee wish to go up so soon, Sally?'

I don't think I spoke to her, but went up the stairs quickly, and opened the door, and cried out low, 'Father; ' and he looked up, and held out his arms to me, and I fell on his neck; and he said, 'It's only for a little, dear lass; we shan't be apart long.' And then he drew back the sheet gently, and I knelt down by her side with my hands in his.

It had only been the day before, and she was so still, with an almost smile on her face of peace and calm, that I seemed to think she must be there still, and kissed the cold forehead, and said, 'O mother, for one word again from thee!' Father didn't shed any tears, but spoke as if it was all appointed for him to meet her soon, and as if he was only waiting for a little time. 'She was quite herself,' he said, 'all the morning, and saw the Vicar when he came to pray by her. And she gave them all her

blessing, and sent for Tom to give him thine; and said what good children she had had. And then she took my hand in hers, and said, "David, it's more than forty years since we two were one; and we've loved each other better and better all along, and thee'll soon be coming after me into the presence of the Lord. And as I look back upon my life," she said, "it all seems like the verse in the Bible,— 'The morning cometh and also the night.' Mine's been a long day, but thy love and God's love have been in it, and the love of children. And now I've folded my hands, and my day's work's over, and the Lord says it's bed-time, and I've only to lie down like the child that's tired and go to sleep; and His death that gave us life brings its life to our death."

'She wandered in her mind after that; and sometimes was going down the field calling the cows, and sometimes singing a bit of a psalm, and sometimes talking to thee, Sally; but later she looked up and said, a bit like herself, "The shadows are falling down the valley—it's the Lord's curtains round us till the morning, and I can't keep waking longer." I don't know whether she knew all what she was saying even then; but I think she did quite at the last, when she opened her eyes and

said, "He hath regarded the lowliness of his hand-maiden," and then turned on her side, and I saw she was gone.'

Father told it all to me quite quiet like, without any hurry in his voice; but my heart was too full for the tears to keep back longer. And then I stood up by him, with my arm round his neck, and looked at mother's face, as she lay so quiet with her hands folded on her breast, thinking it was just as she said, going to sleep tired after her day's work. And I thought that her life hadn't been anything great in the world, so as to be talked and written about outside Penrifle; but that in God's sight it was beautiful, because it was redeemed and holy; and I remembered words she had said to me as a child—that she thought the highest life was that of trying to do our duty where God had put us, for love and gratitude to Him, and determined that it should be my endeavour to follow in her steps, though I should never hear her speak again. Then I took Tom's violets, and put them in her hands where they were folded, as I knew he meant me to; and, Miss Mary, many a Mid-lent Sunday's come round since, but it never comes without bringing to my mind the first and last time that I went a-mothering.

It would be too long to tell you of the two months that I was at home, and of the old friends that came round me, and of how the children had come on in my brothers' and sisters' families. Joe was going to be married, and Phœbe had thoughts of her own like it; but I seemed to care for little but going with father to mother's grave, where the winds of winter were already coming over it up the valley. Tom was braver and truer than ever to me; and saw me well on my journey back into Kent, and talked of the time coming nearer when he'd have me for his own: but I told him I couldn't talk of that just then, for every mile was bringing me further away from Penriffie churchyard. And that winter wasn't out before I got a letter to say that father was found asleep one morning, but that it was a sleep from which he never woke again; and he was laid by mother to rest.

My story's over now about the violets in the lane, Miss Mary, my dear, and your patience might be well tired out already with an old woman's tales; but as you say I'm to go on still, to tell you of your own parents and yourselves, I must try and make it shorter than what's gone before.

I had been two years back under Mrs. Jones when the fever came to Copsley, and Miss Fanny

took it; and she was hardly out of danger when Master Harry sickened, and was near dying. Mrs. Beverley's maid had enough to do with the young lady, and Master Harry—that was your papa—had a fancy for my being about him; upon which everything was given up to that, and a servant put in my place that I might be free for him. He was a long time getting about, and had to be sent to the sea-side for months; and I went to wait on him, and saw the sea for the first time in my life, and understood about the waves roaring and the floods clapping their hands, and the miracles which Madam Shaw had tried to explain to us from the pond at Farmer Donne's, that turned Penrifle mill where it fell.

And that was how it came about that when, nine years after I had come to Copsley, Mrs. Jones went to live with her brother that had lost his wife, I was offered to take her place, although I felt I was very unworthy of such a position. It was her doing; for she spoke very handsomely of me to Mrs. Beverley, and told me afterwards how she had met it that her mistress thought me too young. 'Sarah Markitt, ma'am, has youthfulness in her looks,' she said, 'which can't be denied; but, ma'am, there's a ripeness in her views concerning the care of linen and the management of preserves that

doesn't always come with years. And principles, ma'am, which go into everything, from the made dishes to soup for the poor, and from a stitch instead of a pin to the getting up of your best lace set, may be as firm at twenty-seven as at forty-seven—my own age. You take my word, ma'am ; and when you've given Sarah a trial you'll say that good principles and, I humbly hope, good training, have not been thrown away.'

When Mrs. Jones told me this, I was quite taken aback. Two thoughts together seemed almost more than I could stand—the honour and Mrs. Joan Jervis, and Tom. For he was writing that he had waited long enough ; and that Jacob only served for Rachel seven years, and that he had been ten years caring for none but me ; and one day, when I was ironing out Mrs. Beverley's collars, a knock came at the door, and there he was himself by my side ! Such a turn it gave me of joy and gladness to see his face again, that I forgot my work at the moment ; and do you know, my dear, the lace was scorched, and there's the mark on it—for it was real, and handed down in the family—to this day.

Well, I brought him in to Mrs. Jones, and she made him as welcome as could be ; and then he

told me all about home ; and how Aaron had the farm now, and Esther lived with them ; and Phoebe was married, and the Vicar still living, and a thousand things that I longed to know. And Tom had a look about him that education gives, which made him quite grand in my eyes ; and his manners and speech were so good that I thought he would be ashamed of having a plain, homely body like me, for all Mrs. Jones had done so much for me.

But he didn't think so ; and the estate-steward suddenly dying, Tom offered his services to Mr. Beverley, through Mrs. Jones, until the place should be filled ; and everything prospered so well under his hands, and his knowledge of farming was so great, that our master begged him to keep the situation, quite as a favour to himself ; and said we might have the cottage in the garden, if I liked to be house-keeper, as had been talked of before. So we were married ; and Esther came down, and Joe, and they both stayed at Copsley ; as if we had brought Penriffe into Kent, only wanting the Vicar to make matters complete.

As it was, we were married by Mr. Adairson, the new curate, that afterwards was engaged to our Miss Fanny, and was Mr. Robin's father. That wasn't, however, till just before Mr. Wilfred's coming

of age, which was a great event at Copsley, where there hadn't been such feasting and merriment for many a year ; and never was again till Master Harry—that's your brother—came of age in his turn. If it hadn't been that Mrs. Jones was kind enough to come over from Wethering, where she lived with her brother, to give me a helping hand, and the weight of her experience, I don't know how I should have got through with it all. As it was, I was given to understand from various sources, that many inquiries were made as to the made dishes ; and at the lower table on the lawn, where Master Harry—that was your father—came to give the toasts, leaving the quality for a time to your grandfather and Mr. Wilfred, our health—Tom's and mine—was proposed so handsomely, and Master Harry, though, indeed, he was *Master* no longer, being a fine young man of twenty, threw in a word or two so feeling about my having nursed him in sickness, that I felt more than rewarded for all endeavours. Indeed, his very words of me were 'Faithful friend and servant,' striking a chord in my heart which even my husband didn't know of, and recalling my thoughts that night nine years before, when I was a lonely kitchenmaid in the top attic, and sat and cried upon my box.

We saw little of Miss Fanny after her marriage; for Mr. Adairson had a living up in the north, quite out of the way, they said, among the moors. He was a good man; but a stern one, that never smiled; like bread that's good and wholesome, but left too long in the oven, and comes out mostly crust. He had set his mind on Miss Fanny, and I don't think she could have withstood him if she had tried. But she loved him well, and revered him; and admired his high, self-denying views, as she called them: for he was one that always seemed to think the world was against him, and that to take any pleasure out of one's life was to be weak and indulgent of self. He never seemed to be at rest unless he made himself uncomfortable; and I used to say to Tom that the very sunshine must feel it was taking a liberty if it came into his house any way but by the back-door. But for goodness I seldom knew another like him. He seemed to take it as a favour if he was sent for to a sick person seven miles off on a winter's night, more especially if it was in a storm; and he'd go without anything to eat, more than was enough to keep life in him, if he had a chance to carry something nourishing to the poor, that wanted it more. His landlady—poor Mrs. Swan that was—told me in confidence, that

one time, having sent up a jelly without leave, and thinking it might tempt him as a change, he rang the bell, and spoke to her that seriously about indulgences of the appetite, and life being for conflict and enduring hardness, that she was constrained humbly to promise that she'd never more testify respect in the form of jelly, or even of a custard, if he'd pass it over. 'And, indeed,' she said, when she mentioned it to me, 'he seems almost to take it hard that the meat's done to a turn, and the bread sweet and light: for I believe unleavened bread and bitter herbs would suit him better than anything else.' They feared him at the school, for he'd look upon a bit of mischief among the boys as if it was Gunpowder Plot; and I know he said, that to hesitate in duty or obedience was a crime that brought every sin along with it, and should be strangled in the birth.

After poor Miss Fanny's death, far away from us all, my thoughts used to go often to her little orphan boy that was alone with his father. He would not let him come to us, fearing his getting into ways of luxury with his mother's family; and stories travelled our way of his being brought up strict, as Mr. Adairson said, to fight unhelped through the world. I was pretty sure that his

father's sternness with him would be according to his love ; and when he came first to Copsley I'd have known him anywhere for his child by his determined quiet way of never being daunted, and keeping himself so strictly ; and for his mother's—and that's well for Miss Alice—by his sweet temper and gentleness with all around him.

The years passed away very fast ; Tom and I as happy as I could have thought possible, with plenty of work on our hands, and plenty of love to each other and the family in our hearts. My one sore trial of having none of my own, made me care for all the little ones in the village more than I should otherwise ; and many of them are mothers of families now, whose children know my parlour, as their parents did before them, for being a place of orange-candy and gingerbread-nuts. Meantime, my poor mistress grew older and more sorrowful in her spirit ; and seemed to me, as she was, fading away into her grave, for all master—that was your grandfather—showed her every care and kindness. It's born with some people to go tired through life, I think ; and my poor dear lady seemed as if she had got overdone and out of breath at first starting, and had never been rested since.

Such different ways there are of looking at life !

There's gentlemen who seem to look over the past on the pages of their game-books; and there's women who do the same by their lists of pickles and household accounts. I'm not sure that the last wouldn't be something of my temptation, if I hadn't a Bible and Prayer-book in my little old wooden box that I came with to Copsley, and a violet in at the 128th Psalm; and an old plaited bonnet in with them; and a sampler, with a Collect worked on it by my own hands; and the white favour, though it's yellow now, that Tom wore on our wedding-day; and a few flowers, dried and withered, that he gave me the Sunday before his death; and bits of your hair when you were little ones; and a little ship your father gave me when he was a boy and I nursed him at the sea-side; and other things that have my history in them for me, but which will be of no value when I'm gone.

Mrs. Beverley, poor dear lady! always looked on the shady side. One day I came up to her, and she had in her hand a whole bundle of prescriptions that doctors had given her, many of them yellow and faded, and the ink brown. 'I've been thinking over my life, Blackett,' she said, 'and what a deal of sickness and trouble there is here below. Here's a
-ripe I had given me before Mr. Wilfred was born,

and another after; and this is what I had for my chest the spring it was so weak; and this other for a bad digestion; and this was for the fever which the children had; and this for Miss Fanny's ankle that was strained. Ah, dear! there's more care than pleasure here below!' And I made bold to try and comfort her, poor lady! and to say that along with every packet of medicines one can see, there must be a bundle of mercies, if we look for them rightly; for either there's recovery, or soothing of one's pain, or our Father's care to teach us His way, or His gift of submission, or something that's for our good. But she only sighed, and said, 'Very true, Blackett—very true!' while she kept on still looking over the doctors' prescriptions, which always seem to me written as if a spider had got into the ink, and walked about afterwards on the paper to get dry.

I've often thought since that it's like that with different people. Some look back over their joys and blessings and pleasures; and others, that are the careful and anxious ones, over their troubles and sorrows and prescriptions.

After my poor mistress died, and your papa had married pretty Miss Graham, that was the Bishop's niece, and had gone to London as a lawyer, Mr.

Wilfred lived here at the Hall alone with your grandfather. He was quite different to Mr. Harry ; being cold and silent and reserved, but quite the gentleman. The house, however, seemed dull and lonely with only two in it ; and we wished he would take a wife, and have little ones playing about in the passages, and working in the little gardens that were his and his brother's and sister's twenty years before.

I shan't go into my own sorrow now, Miss Mary, when my husband was struck down by a tree falling upon him as he was giving directions for its being cut down. Even at this time of life, and hoping soon to meet him again, I can't talk about it, or have it written for others to see. It's enough to say, that in the great sorrow of losing him, I couldn't forget the blessing of all the years we had loved each other, from the day when he got over the stile out of Madam Shaw's way to the last morning when, before going out, he gave me a kiss and said, 'Sally, what's it to come to at last, if I go on loving thee better every day as I do now?' And I said, 'It'll come to perfect love at the last, Tom, without a break or a hindrance ;' and that's what it'll come to yet, my dear.

I was only a year a widow when you were born

and your mamma died. I remember the news coming so well ; and then a letter from Mr. Harry, with black wax on it, begging I'd try and come to him, and nurse his motherless children for as long as I could. And my poor old master made a shift to do without me ; and, with my heart full of my own sorrow and yours, I came to the house in London, and took you to my bosom as you lay smiling and crowing, such a sweet baby all unconscious of your loss ; and I thought that I had got a fresh work put before me now, and that I was the solitary one set in families.

Master Harry was full of life and frolic, and little Miss Alice quite a lady in her ways, which were shy and gentle and loving. She was not clear in her mind why her mother didn't come back ; and said mamma was gone away to heaven, and had sent her a new black frock made by the angels ; and would she come back soon ? Master Georgie was very white and delicate, poor dear, and wanted a mother's care ; which I desired to show him and you all, for your own sakes and for your father's, whom I had loved from his childhood.

You can't remember, though Miss Alice can, the time of your grandfather's death, soon after poor Mr. Wilfred's, that took a fever when he was tra-

velling abroad ; or our coming back to Copsley, and my heart's desire of being here, where Tom was buried, being fulfilled. But I can tell you how good it was to hear you all about the house, playing and singing like a nest of young birds ; while I prayed that your dear father, who was so lonely and desolate, might get comfort, as you all grew up to be blessings to him.

Master Harry was nearly eleven, and Master Robin a year older, when I saw a change in your father's looks and ways, and that he grew to mind more about things in the house, and to notice that the drawing-room furniture was shabby and needed renewing, and that the flower-garden wanted attending to. Every change in life has its signs beforehand, I think, Miss Mary ; and I wasn't surprised one day, after your papa had been the second time to Scotland that autumn, at his calling me into the library, and asking me to sit down, for he wished to speak to me. I had been preparing myself for what was coming ; and yet I don't mind saying it was like a blow when he told me of his being about to bring a new lady, and Scotch, to Copsley. He couldn't have put it more kindly than he did ; and he said that he had told her that was to be Mrs. Beverley of my being a friend as well as servant ; and that he

should leave all preparations in my hands, for they couldn't be better ; and I was to consult my own taste in the matter of curtains and toilet-covers in the bed-rooms : but my heart misgave me, as I wished him happiness, and that it might be all for the best.

'All for the best, Sarah !' he said, in his own merry way that he used to have when he was only Master Harry to me—calling me Sarah, too, like old times ; 'why, that's what you'd have said to me when I was a little boy, and had to take medicine ! You'll look differently upon it next Christmas.'

I told him that he must forgive me if I hadn't my right words foremost just at first—thinking, too, of the dear children.

'They're not come foremost yet, Sarah,' he said, laughing at me all the time : 'you've gone to the wrong shelf, for the first time in your life, and taken down condolences for congratulations. It's as much for their happiness as for mine.'

'Mr. Harry, sir—that is, begging your pardon, Mr. Beverley,'—I said, getting quite out of patience with myself, 'you know I'd lay down my life for you and yours, and if I don't express myself properly you know what I mean to say ; which is, that while

it pleases you to keep me in your family, I'll serve you day and night ; and if trouble should come to you, I'd serve you more than ever with all my heart ; and if I seem old-fashioned and in the way to a new lady, and she's better with a finer housekeeper, why, sir, I'll leave without your having words or difficulties in the way on my account; and love you and pray for you all the same.'

I think the tears were up in my eyes as I spoke ; and he looked at me full in the face, and said, ' You're determined upon it that I'm coming to trouble, Sarah, in giving my children a step-mother ; and now listen to me ! While I live, and you live, and they live, this house is your home : but if you think I've made a mistake by the time New-year's Day is here, I give you leave to tell me, and to go where you like, so that you let me provide for you as comfortably as if your husband were living still.'

Well, after that I came down into my room, and lit a fire for company, and sat looking into it, having put on the kettle for a cup of tea. And I thought and thought to myself of all the step-mothers I had ever known of—for my fear was for the children. I had heard stories of ruling with a rod of iron, and of mothers-in-law that had tried to get all the money for their own, and who had got

the father's love away from the first family. 'And there's the story in the Beverley family,' I said to myself, 'of the proud lady ; and there was Sarah and Ishmael, and the queen that poisoned her stepson, and ever so many more ; and there was Mrs. Allen at Penriffe, that turned Susan's father against her, so that, if it hadn't been for Madam Shaw's training her, and taking her in, she'd have been thrown friendless on the world ;' and so my heart sank and sank within me, until I heard the children's voices on the stairs, as they came running down to my room—Master Harry the first—saying, 'O Mrs. Blackett, we're to have a new mamma !'

I felt almost guilty with knowing so much more than they could about it ; and took you, Miss Mary, on my knee and kissed you, and then put my arm round Miss Alice, who was ten years old, and quieter and more thoughtful ; and I hardly knew how to answer her when she said, 'Nursie, arn't you glad ? Papa says she will love us so much.' But I wouldn't—not for worlds—have been false to master, or put a thought into your heads that wasn't right or respectful of her that was to be a mother to you ; so I said, 'You'll try and be good children, my dears ; every one loves good children.' And Master Georgie turned off the subject very well ; for

on his asking me if his new mamma would give him sugar-candy and oranges, I warned him of letting her think he was a greedy boy ; and told him the story of Jack Horner that was noted ever after for being such ; and applied it to him in poetry that I found in a book for the young, lent me for you, my dears, by the schoolmistress, and which had a moral song against love of eating, with lines like these :—

‘ Yet, like that self-complacent child of old,
Who, sitting in a corner, we are told,
From his famed Christmas pie withdrew, surprised,
The single plum which he immortalized,
I hear you crying, “ Give me ratafees !
Help me to sugar-candy, if you please ! ” ’

I threw in the sugar-candy myself,—‘ nuts and almonds ’ being printed ; and it had a very good effect, though he couldn’t follow it all through, Master Georgie promising not to be greedy : and, indeed, all the times that you two, with Miss Alice, played at your new mamma’s coming, I never heard any return to his asking for sweets.

The house was quite upside down for some weeks,—master going backwards and forwards to London, and workmen being employed painting and papering. I was as busy as possible looking

after them, and seeing that the housemaids did their duty, and the men theirs.

And all the time, my heart was heavy within me ; and I drew pictures to myself of what Mrs. Beverley would be like. ‘ Tall and dark,’ I said to myself, ‘ and with black eyes with fire in them—that’s the kind that runs in mothers-in-law ; and a commanding voice, that’ll teach me my place if I’ve come to be too free in the house, there having been no lady for so long. But it’s not for myself I mind ; it’s for the dear children. It’ll break my heart to see any one hard upon Miss Alice, that has such a tender spirit ; and Master Georgie is so delicate that he’ll not stand against harshness ; and Miss Mary—that was you, my dear—Miss Mary’s just like a kitten that runs round after its own tail, so full of fun and play that’ll seem like rude manners to a fine lady like Mrs. Beverley that is to be.’ And then, Miss Mary—for I was a foolish, fearful body—I made up a sort of story to myself, lying awake at night and thinking about you all, of Miss Alice being oppressed, and all the spirit taken out of her ; and Master Harry running away from home ; and a new family putting the first out of their place, and away from master’s heart ; and when the day

came that was to bring you your new mamma, I felt so weak and trembling that I had to take myself to task for a stupid woman not fit for my place.

I hadn't need to go over the whole house again that morning, for I had done nothing else the day before, and kept thinking to myself that there wasn't a mansion in Kent that seemed handsomer, and more what a grand lady might desire to come home to. Master had spared no expense; and the new papers, and red doors, and rich carpets, gave a tone to the whole that, as the foreman who had come down from London had said, was in harmony with the feelings and the season.

No, Miss Mary, it wasn't the house, it was the dinner that lay heavy on my mind. If my master had only thought to give me as much direction as 'Turkey at the head, and a saddle of mutton at the foot,' it would have been a kind of leading, and a guide to my mind; but he had said nothing in his note, written after his marriage—for that had taken place though I tried to put it out of my head—beyond, 'You may expect us home on the 18th; in time for dinner at six, or thereabouts.'

It was rather a comfort to me than otherwise to have had an old friend like Master Clarke look in a day or two before, and to tell him the anxiety

which no one in the house could properly share with me; for the butler was new and had only been a fortnight here, and the footman under him hadn't lived in any family of importance till he came to us; and Mrs. Martin looked to me entirely for directions, she said, reserving it to herself to carry them out; while I told her that, if she had regard for my feelings, she'd think and think as to what would be most acceptable to a Scotch lady of family, two heads being better than one: though I felt the responsibility still must fall on me.

'Master Clarke,' I said, after putting a glass of ale by his side, 'you, having read of, and seen many foreign ways, can perhaps give me a guiding thought as to what a lady from Scotland might be pleased to fancy. You see, there's everything in first impressions; and for my master's sake, and the poor dear children's, I'd like that his lady should take the head of a table showing attention to her feelings.'

He thought for a time, and spoke very sensibly as to the truth of my remark: 'but yet,' he said, 'Mrs. Blackett, as you put it to me, I can't think of anything more Scotch than English, unless it is that the thistle stands for the first, equally with the rose for the last.'

'But, Master Clarke,' I said, 'one doesn't ex-

pect a lady to *eat* thistles, however Scotch; and truly the naming, even, of such a thought brings comparisons to my mind that are neither fitting nor becoming to mention. Indeed,' I said, 'I couldn't bring myself even to having such on the table in a pot, unless I was very sure first that it would be according to her wishes.' And beyond that I couldn't get anything out of him, Miss Mary; and my cookery-books didn't help me much—naming sheep's head and oat-cake as more of national dishes than anything else that I could find: while I figured it to myself that it would never do for me, with the best intentions, to order sheep's head and oat-cake, with a thistle in a flower-pot in the middle of the table, for the new lady's first arrival; whatever she might be pleased to arrange afterwards. However, from no notice being taken, I had every reason to believe that the fowls and saddle of mutton, with entrées and sweets in accordance, were, after all, acceptable to your mamma and to my master; which was all I could desire.

Well, my dear, all the morning I was occupied in going over linen-cupboards and store-closets, with lists in my hand freshly written out. I had made a cake and a tin of biscuits in readiness for

my own cupboard, that when I should give up my keys—if that was to be—I might still have some little pleasures in my parlour for all of you. For I knew it might come to that, if our new lady wasn't too grand to be managing; and I thought to myself that I had read how, when a city was given up, the keys were brought out to the new rulers; and had looked over mine—the linen-press one that was bent, and those of the store-room and cellar, and cupboard on the first landing, and apple-room, and tea-store, and all the rest; making up a little history in my mind of that which might be on the morrow, when I should give them up to her whose right they would be. And you'll hardly believe me, Miss Mary, when I tell you, that I seemed to feel that affection for each one—even for that of the bacon-store, which generally stuck in the lock, and had always given me trouble,—that I hardly knew how to lay them down, thinking that perhaps I had called them mine for the last time.

Then you all came running down to me, so pretty and innocent like, to know whether you mightn't get some flowers from the hot-house for your new mamma; which was Miss Alice's thought, and just like her. And my feelings were too much for me almost; while I felt it a sort of a reproach

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both ways that you should be taking a pleasure in making ready for her. And I cut the cake, Miss Mary, that was to be put by in my cupboard; for I couldn't in that moment do less; thinking some one might be coming between my children and me from that time forward for evermore.

There's a deal in the making of a cake, if it comes from the heart. Do you know, my dear, that time I went to London, to Joe's son at Camberwell, I happened to go in with his wife—that's my niece-in-law—to the grocer's at the corner. And I looked about me, and saw cakes at the top of a tin case, and felt a surprise that they should be sold at a grocer's. And he, seeing where my eyes were directed, took one up, and put it in my hand, and said, 'We sell many of these, madam; they're all from the manufacture at Reading, as are the biscuits likewise.'

'What!' I said, 'cakes—not to say biscuits—made by machinery! like paper and cotton that's turned off from mills!'

'Exactly so,' he made answer, speaking quite lightly of the matter; 'there's thousands turned off in a minute. They're put in, flour and butter, and eggs and sugar, one side; and they come out cakes at the other.'

‘Sir,’ I said, and perhaps I spoke strongly, for I felt it, ‘I wouldn’t buy, much less eat, one of these cakes that I see here before me, not at any price; and I don’t wonder, with such before my eyes, that there’s artificial ways coming up in every line of life, such as I was never used to in other days. I’ve heard of chickens,’ I said, ‘poor motherless things! being hatched by hundreds in warm air, and coming out into the world, never knowing where they was laid, or getting so much as a cluck to encourage them in their efforts; and I wouldn’t believe it: but I believe it now. They may put in butter and eggs, and whatever they like, into those mills that you make mention of, sir,’ I said; ‘but where’s the mind and the thought put, I should like to know, that goes into cakes deserving of being called such?’

I didn’t commit myself further to him, Miss Mary; but I spoke freely going home to Joe’s daughter-in-law, a young woman of very good principles that deserve strengthening. ‘My dear,’ I said, ‘never be led away by such shifts for heartless folk, as we have just been witnessing of. Why, when I make a cake, which I do even now for love of Miss Janie, and to keep my hand in—though, of course, in my position it’s not

needful—I put that thought into it that seems to give a flavouring to the whole. Here's a bit of citron,' I say, 'for Missy likes to find a bit unexpected ; and Miss Mary, for all she's a grown young lady, will be cutting herself a slice on her way into the garden, and likes a flavour of lemon, which is easily thrown in : and so I go on, until one seems to know it as a friend when it comes out of the oven, with a glow on it—as much as to say it's happy to see you again—that's between a brown and an orange ; and that's the true colouring not to be got in mills.

But I've been wandering off again, my dear, and it's a shame to tax your patience. It was that cake set me thinking, which now brings me back to the day that your mamma came to Copsley.

Well, by five o'clock the house and everything was ready ; and the maids sent to put on their new caps with white ribbon in them, and the children to the nursery to be dressed ; and I, myself, after putting on my best black satin gown—a present from master—and my new cap with white ribbons too, for I wouldn't be behindhand in wishing him joy, went through the rooms to look to the fires, and to give a sort of shake to the curtains, with a toss at the end, that only comes with experience,

and to see how the dining-room was laid out. It looked very rich and handsome, with the best plate on the table, and all the oak furniture polished even to my satisfaction. The silver lamps were not lit; but the fire threw a red glow over everything, which the butler, who had been a traveller in foreign parts, assured me afterwards is only seen in England: and as I looked at the carved high-backed chair at the head of the table, opposite the high-backed chair at the foot, with the candelabra and épergne sparkling in between, I thought it was more fitting that the stately lady that was coming to Copsley should be in that place, than our pretty gentle Miss Alice, that I had hoped to see there a few years on, but whose way now was to get a footstool, and sit down at her father's feet.

My heart beat as hardly ever before when six o'clock struck, and the children came down to the hall. I had requested nurse to dress them in white—the young ladies, I mean; and Miss Alice stood there, with her bunch of flowers in her hand, just like a lily blushing at being mistook for a rose, as her colour came and went, her hair all thrown back over her shoulders, and her large brown eyes with the look in them of wanting some one that's often seen in motherless girls. You, Miss Mary, were so full of

fun, being a little one, not six years old, that it was all I could do to keep you from spoiling your dress by jumping up and down the stairs; while your brothers thought less than I could have believed of such a great thing happening to them, talking most of what your papa had promised to bring them from Scotland; Master Robin, meantime, keeping by Miss Alice, and telling her that she needn't be afraid of her new mamma's not thinking her all she ought to be.

I was the first to hear the wheels in the avenue; and as they came nearer and nearer, and the maids all stood along the hall, and the men went down to the door, you came up, and put your little hand into mine, Miss Mary: and I looked at you all for the last time, saying to myself, 'They're mine now no longer.' And then the carriage stopped; and your papa got out, and handed down the new lady of Copsley Hall, and gave her his arm, and she just came up through the line of domestics, bowing to us, as we curtsied all the way down, and looked to where Miss Alice came forward in her white dress, and folded her in her arms tightly, and then you, Miss Mary, and then the young gentlemen; and when she didn't speak a word, I looked up, and saw she was crying.

She was so different from my ideas that I could hardly believe that master hadn't made a mistake, and that it was the real Mrs. Beverley that I had been expecting so long. For, as I remember her then, she looked quite young; and she was very small and slight in figure, and her hair came out in brown curls from under a sort of blue velvet bonnet, that was neither a bonnet nor a hood, but that suited well with her black velvet cloak trimmed with ermine, and her rich silk dress; and as I saw her there, with tears that were mixed up of joy, and love, and care for our motherless little ones, falling over Miss Alice's head, a hope came up into my mind that the future mightn't be so dark after all.

Master, himself, afterwards called me up to her, saying, 'Maggie, you know how often I have told you of my old friend Mrs. Blackett, that nursed me when I was only a boy;' and in a moment she had taken my hand in hers, with a smile on her face that seemed to be friends with the tears in her eyes, and said, 'You mustn't be a *new* friend to me, Mrs. Blackett; but let me feel that you are an old one already, for my husband's sake.'

Well, my dear, my feelings were giving way a little about step-mothers, although I'm not one to renounce views in a hurry: but I said no word to

any one that evening, while seeing that all things were proper for dinner, and the children neat for dessert. And at eight o'clock, I went to the drawing-room for Master Georgie and you, it being your bed-time, and my custom being always to take you up to nurse, after your saying your prayers in my own parlour. The door was a little bit open, and the velvet curtains inside only partly drawn across, so that I could see right in to where you were. And there, on a low stool down on the hearth-rug, was your new mamma, with you in her lap, and Master Georgie lying by her side, with his head against her shoulder—and no handkerchief thrown between to save her dress; and Miss Alice was down on the rug on the other side, with the other arm round her, nestling up close by you; and the two young gentlemen opposite were looking at her as if she was some fairy newly come among you, and they hardly knew how to take her. And she was telling you the story, Miss Mary, of a little white kitten that she had had once when a little girl herself; and how it had strayed away, and how she had cried, and looked for it in all sorts of funny places, and how all of a sudden, from out of a bucket half down a well, she had heard *Miaou ! miaou !* and how—.

But I didn't listen any longer. Seeing her—that sweet, young, new mamma—down amongst you all, and hearing her tell you her story, and miaouing like a pussy cat in it, was too much for my feelings ; and I went back quick into my parlour, and, with that sound in my ears, burst out crying, and called myself an ungracious, foreboding woman, that had been fearing her greatest blessing that was coming to her, and that did come, my dear, when my second mistress—our Lady of Copsley, as Mr. George calls her often—crossed the doors of the Hall.

And the next morning I was in my parlour, thinking of what steps I should take with regard to dinner orders, when Master Harry jumped in, calling out, 'Here's mamma coming to see you, Mrs. Blackett!' And I took up my keys directly, remembering still, perhaps, about a city taken, and was ready to give them to her, when she knocked at the door, and stood there blushing and smiling, you on one side and Miss Alice on the other. And, 'Mrs. Blackett,' she said, 'I'm going to ask you to take a new pupil, and let me into some of your ways ; for I'm not nearly so wise as I ought to be, with all these children given to me for my Christmas present. My husband thinks

there's no such housekeeping as yours.' And as she said that, with a sweet Scotch voice, and with a smile that didn't die away on her face until another came to look for it, I was fairly conquered, and said as well as I could, 'My dear young lady—that is, mistress—I've loved Master Harry—that is, I mean, my master—for nearer forty years than thirty; and I'm thankful that it has pleased God to bring you here to the children that have been like my own; and if you'll excuse my shortcomings, and accept my humble endeavours, I'll serve you with all my heart day and night, and whatever experience I have I shall care for more than ever if it's to be of any service to you.'

And master asked me on New-year's Day, Miss Mary, if I was looking out for a situation, as he does now sometimes for a joke: but I didn't give warning. And sometimes I think, if it's not too great an ambition, that at least it will be told of me when I'm dead and gone, and buried at Copsley, where, if I'm spared, I hope at last to lie, that I was for fifty years a humble friend and servant in the family of Henry Beverley, Esquire; though I feel it's too much to expect that it should be said concerning me, as concerning Mrs. Joan Jervis, that I 'lived respected and died lamented.'

V.

Our Lady of Copsley: her Story.

'FLOWERS FROM WEE JANIE'S GARDEN.'



OUR LADY OF COPSLEY: HER STORY.

‘ Flowers from wee Janie’s garden.’

‘ Wee Janie so bonny ! wee Janie so fair !
The sunbeams had woven a snood for her hair ;
Then, seeking for violets, wearily crept
Beneath her soft eyelids ; and tarried and slept :
And they tarry there still, both asleep and awake,
And sportively laugh at their timely mistake.’

THAT ’s my wee Janie—my own own bairn ; and those fine words are her brother Georgie’s, the poet of the family, if he chose to allow it, and chief confidant to Janie, who tyrannizes in a queenly

fashion over all her admirers. Georgie declares that the light in my Janie's dark-blue eyes, sometimes so still and deep, and sometimes so merry and mischievous, is bye-ordinary, as we say in Scotland, and must be accounted for by a special theory; and it is thus that he accounts for it.

I don't know about special theories; but I *do* know that my Janie, given to me after many years of waiting, and when I had thought that all my love was to be for my adopted ones, and that the nestling-place in my arms was never to cradle a little one that should reign there in her own right, is bonny enough for a Beverley; and yet has canny little bits of Scotch in her ways, and on her tongue, that bring me back to my old home, just as a bit of heather, down on the Devonshire moors, carries me away in spirit to the Perthshire hills, and to childish days of my own.

Mary, we used to call Finis; and when wee Janie came, I called her my Supplement; and she seems to me to have a bit of every one of the others in her composition—Harry's mischief, and Alice's sweetness, and Georgie's thoughtfulness, and Mary's frankness, with just a Scotch infusion of wise, wilful, original spirit, that shows in those blue eyes of hers, when she looks one through and

through, and then all of a sudden darts off to carry out some deep plot or scheme, mentioned in strict confidence to each member of the family, and monopolizing proportionate interest and secret sympathy.

‘One of Janie’s secrets,’ is a household saying for a rumour spread through the house, and currently reported in whispers; and Janie’s profound mysteries place her on a footing of confidential and important relationship with every one in both upper and lower regions: which is well; as some of those schemes of hers might lead to undesirable results, were they not met by grown-up interference and direction.

To her little mind nothing, indeed, could be more charming than clandestinely to turn the water-cock in the conservatory, and to produce a flood, ‘that all the p’ants and f’owers and things might f’oat like Noah’s ark on the top of the water.’ And had it not been that those fat little fingers had not strength to effect her purpose, even as she stood on tip-toe, and that thus the co-operation of an older person was required, a ruin of camelias and geraniums would have been effected quite sufficient to equal any expectations less animated than her own.

And in the same manner, a most timely discovery of my Janie’s best intentions, alone saved

sister Mary's water-colour view of Copsley Park from the gratuitous and effective introduction of a 'b'ue b'ue sky,' which, armed with a cake of indigo incautiously left within reach, that little damsel was preparing to rub in 'over the clouds in the ceiling, and all for a surp'ise ;' while she still laments over having been intercepted in an enterprise of concealing herself behind the pendulum of the great hall clock—'a little cupboard just big enough for me'—whence she thought to astonish the various members of the family as they passed by to dinner.

But what is to become of my wee wifie in this big house, where, from papa downwards, every member of the family combines to do away with the effects of her mother's judicious education, by a system of unmitigated spoiling? And how am I to carry out disciplinarian measures, when they take no effect upon the subject thereof? Only yesterday, Janie was sentenced to the punishment of being put in the corner in its most aggravated form—her face being turned to the wall—in consequence of the C-A-T, *dog* battle, which meets teacher and scholar at the entrance to the fields of literature, having been too much for that wilful little spirit of hers. And on my coming, with a heavy heart, to

release her at the end of half-an-hour, and to wipe away tears of penitence from the blue eyes already mentioned, I was greeted with a joyous 'O mamma, *do* look here! there's two *darling* little spiders that have made a web; and there's a wee wee fly nearly caught in it; and they want to catch it, and I'm waiting to see if they will!' And what was I to say?

Yes, the devotion of one of the family alone to her little majesty, would be a risk to any mortal child; but when every single member takes the same line, I see no possible escape from the perils by which she is surrounded, and sometimes threaten to send her away to her aunts in Scotland, to be trained into the domestic virtues and into all the proprieties of life. The audacity with which she pushes open the door of the library, and climbs on her papa's knee, and takes liberties with his watch, and puts her soft arms round his neck with a coaxing, 'I'm papa's Scotch Janie!' is only equalled by the manner in which she makes one with her elder brothers and sisters, stealing into their rooms, trying on their hats and rings, and superintending their arrangements with a little business-like air of sole responsibility, which they are rather too much inclined to encourage.

‘Miss Janie’s a deal of business on her hands,’ I heard Mrs. Blackett say to nurse the other day, with a bit of wholesome satire in her voice, as that small woman chattered concerning a coming school-tea in the coach-house, and how she must make haste and see that the buns were there, and get the holly for sister Alice to put on the table, and ask Mrs. Martin to have ‘quan’ties and quan’ties of tea’ ready: ‘but she’ll have a deal more when the spring’s here; and she’ll have to see to the buds coming out, and the daisies putting on their white pinafores, and the birds building their nests in the trees, and everything being made ready for the summer.’ And when Janie looked up, overwhelmed at the load of care suddenly placed on her little shoulders, Mrs. Blackett took her up on her knee and gave her a brief discourse concerning her irresponsibility in matters out of her own domain, and the lowly demeanour befitting her tender years, which I was delighted she should receive. But, alas for the good influences of Mrs. Blackett’s parlour, when Janie committed herself into Harry’s keeping, or, rather, admitted him into hers! ‘And what am I to do next, Janie?’ I heard him say in a confidential tone of inquiry; and then, to his sisters,—‘Alice, Janie thinks you had better tell

the children to sing ; Mary, Janie begs you to distribute more buns ;' until I told that injudicious eldest son that she should be sent to bed, if he turned her little head with any more pretences of brief authority.

But, for all Mrs. Blackett's discreet exhortations, she is herself nearly as bad as the rest of the family.

'What are you to come to at last, Miss Janie ?' said nurse, anxiously, in that good woman's presence, 'if you spoil three pinafores in the day out playing with your brother, and tear your frocks till they're not fit to be mended ?' But my little maiden faced her position even under such circumstances as those described, and running to her old friend's knee, and putting her head in her lap, answered promptly, 'I'll come to you, Mrs. Blackett !'—an alternative that was received more approvingly than was fair to her nurse, who felt her ground of appeal taken from under her, and left Janie mistress of the position.

Yes, Mrs. Blackett's parlour is, next to mamma's room, the Elysium of my child's heart. While shut up for interminable periods with that inestimable housekeeper, castles in the air are built, on the best principles, thanks to Mrs. Blackett's advice ; mys-

terious compounds are brought forth in joint partnership, gingerbreads of every shape, from a star to a lady on horseback, ushered into existence, and an amount of narrative poured forth from family and Shropshire lore compared with which the *Arabian Nights* sink into insignificance, and which has for others, as well as Janie, no little charm.

I am not sure whether her seat by Georgie's sofa is not my little girl's best schoolroom; and whether the long years of invalidism, which only now seem to be giving way to the brightness of possible recovery—though other brightness they have long known—have not given to his intercourse with her just that power which makes durable impression even on the yielding waxen nature of a young child. To his side tributes of a miscellaneous nature are constantly conveyed, with a scarcely-expressed sympathy for the weakness which prevents his entering into active pleasures and pursuits; even a little tadpole of tender age being surrendered spontaneously to her sick brother, in the hope of its cheering the tedium of long confinement. And it was to Georgie that the confidence was once made, that of all the cherished wishes of Janie's heart for her birthday, that of a garden 'all for my own' reigned supreme. 'Not

a garden with p'ants and f'owers *put* there ; but one for myself, to put my own p'etty f'owers in.'

And in state on Harry's shoulders, and followed in procession by a detachment of her family, wee Janie was borne on the eventful summer morning in question, to take possession of her new estate—a small piece of barren but well-dug territory, over which she was to reign according to her own sweet will.

'Miss Janie'll be taking to Scotch gardening,' said her old friend the gardener, passing by ; 'she'll be giving us new notions for the forcing-houses one of these days.'

'And it's for my very own !' exclaimed Janie, clasping her little hands rapturously—'for my very very own ! O dear ! I'll have so much to do all day !'

I suspect that my little girl will put plenty of force into all her undertakings by-and-by ; and my desire for her is, that planting and sowing of the truest and most lasting nature may be her work in days yet to come. As it was, the whole importance of the enterprise which was to result in the rapid fertilization of her property, came out in solemn puckers on her fair forehead, in anxious shakings of head and curls, as every temptation

from the work in hand was steadfastly resisted, and in outward signs of her being lady of the soil, which caused nurse, whose remonstrances generally take a future turn, to ejaculate,—‘ Miss Janie, Miss Janie ! If you get your hands like this on your birthday, what ’ll they look like at the end of the year ? ’ Janie’s complacent reply,—‘ P’raps they ’ll be like the *dear* ’ittle b’ack children’s in Af’ica, that never come white any more,’ being in no wise calculated to soothe her ruffled feelings.

‘ I ’m so busy,’ was the burden of her remarks, as she bustled out after her dinner to resume her labours ; ‘ it ’s very particklar *indeed*,’ the assurance which met Georgie’s inquiry as to the nature of her occupation : and nothing but an employment, in her eyes ‘ very particklar indeed,’ would have accounted for the tranquillity of the house during the long, bright July afternoon.

Later on, however, a little voice, in which a plaintive intonation sometimes varies its merry and musical chime, was heard sounding through the passages. ‘ Papa ! Mamma ! Brother Harry ! Sister Mary ! come to my garden ! come to my own boo’ful garden ! ’—an invitation, followed by such an appeal from blue eyes, and such risk to muslin dresses from little brown hands, that, as usual, her

mandate was obeyed, and we obediently followed in her train.

My own wee Janie! How proudly she surveyed the results of her labours, and rejoiced in the work of her hands! Daisies and buttercups, roses and pinks (the latter being tributes levied on the gardeners), were grouped in a motley medley, all standing up with their stalks stuck into the ground; and interspersed with a marvellous collection of feathers from the poultry-yard, that seemed to flutter with surprise at their unexpected association.

‘I did it all myself,’ said wee Janie, proudly, ‘and it’s boo’ful!’

And the next morning my child had to learn the lesson which, sooner or later, and in some form or another, comes to us all, as she surveyed the dead, rootless flowers which lay scattered on the ground, and contemplated, with a perplexed sigh, the futility of her yesterday’s endeavours.

‘They’re dead—all dead!’ was the burden of her tale, as she ran in among us at the breakfast-table; and I thought that Harry’s promise, endorsed and ratified promptly with bread and marmalade, of giving her some real seeds and plants, followed too rapidly on her disappointment for the lesson—some part of which even her little brains

might take in—to be enforced in a talk with her mother or Georgie.

I wonder why I am writing all these fond, foolish memorials of the little one who, in spite of herself, has fallen asleep to-night, protesting that 'It's so nice to be alive, she doesn't want to go to sleep!'

Mrs. Blackett says, that feelings thrown in upon the system are apt to tell injuriously on the constitution. Perhaps the wholesome safety-valve of pen and paper at hand, has led me to commit to them some of the thoughts which cluster round the little golden head that is, now at least, quietly reposing on the pillow: and it may be, that if these results of maternal weakness should escape Mary's researches in her explorations for family documents of the house of Beverley, I shall some day, when my little one is no longer 'wee Janie,' read them over, and recall the associations which bring us back to the first morning days of those we love.

'A flower from wee Janie's garden!' This is a household word with us now for resolutions unfulfilled, and for determinations which, having no root, immediately wither away.

It is strange how often the words come to my lips concerning the work of the world, and the cry

for 'results'—results to order, as it were—which in these days is sounding on every side around us.

One hears it in the educational clamour; as if all the results of labour in that field must immediately be seen on the surface—the time of rooting and underground growth being little taken into account. And I have sometimes thought that many a showy display of childish learning and surface-knowledge has more than a fancied resemblance to the flower-show that took place on a bright July morning in my Janie's garden.

And in the field of society upon which she will one day enter, and in which our boys and girls growing up must take their part, there are forms of speech concerning 'success,' and 'effect,' and 'producing of sensation,' which fall inharmoniously upon the ear; while the quiet life of unselfishness, with its deep-thrown roots, and the unostentatious, self-denying existences of many who produce neither effect nor sensation, are lightly esteemed, although their removal would create a void, and an uprending of heart fibres as much wider and deeper than that following theirs who live only for externals, as would the uprooting of the deeply-grounded tree in comparison with that of the short-lived occupants of my Janie's garden.

But, after all, it is in one's own heart that the danger is the greatest, and that we are most inclined to look well on flowers of amiability and external goodness, which have no real root, but are just the results of circumstance and natural disposition. And we are too liable to forget that a rooting and grounding in a higher and deeper Love than belongs to this world, is that alone whereby we can bring forth fruit. Yes, when I look within, I often see too much resemblance to the husbandry of wee Janie's garden.

Wee Janie, wee Janie! sleeping so tranquilly, resting so trustfully! Thy mother is bending over thee with mother-love and mother-hope. But the culture of that little heart of thine is more to her—a thousand-fold more—than the deep light of the blue eyes under those long lashes, or than the clear ring of thy sweet child-voice. God make thee true, wee Janie, and earnest, and steadfast! God plant in thy soul resolution and purpose, and will for Him, that shall have deep root in gratitude and love, and that shall bring forth much fruit! So thine eyes, with the light of His love in them, shall brighten the way of all around thee ever more and more; my sweet bonnie bairn, my own one sprig of Scotch heather, my wilful, loving, happy, darling wee Janie!

VI.

Master Clarke : his Story.

'THEY'RE FOLKS OF MAR TOPHAM'S TRADE.'



MASTER CLARKE: HIS STORY.

'They're folks of Mar Topham's trade.'

'MASTER Clarke,' he says, 'you don't like these Garwoods ; I can see it quite plain.'

'No, sir, I don't,' I says ; 'which is plain likewise.'

'And why not ?' he says.

And I says that it wasn't for a person in my place to speak evil of one's neighbours ; 'but the long and short of it is, sir,' I says, 'that they're folks of Mar Topham's trade ; and such are better out of the way.'

‘And what’s Mar Topham’s trade?’ he says.

And I, remembering that he was well-nigh a stranger in the parish, gives him answer with the story which made a noise long ago at Copsley, when I hadn’t been ten years clerk, and not long after the time that Mr. Wilfred Beverley, that’s dead, came of age.

‘Master Clarke,’ he says, thinking upon it, ‘you’ve many opportunities of observing life, in all sorts of varieties.’

To which I makes reply, that he says no more than the truth; ‘though the varieties,’ I says, ‘that comes most under my notice is of the three sorts that have been all along—births, deaths, and marriages.’

‘Very true,’ he says, thinking again; and then goes away, meditating upon it, as was fitting.

After a few days, he comes again to my house, and says how he’s been thinking over the story that I was a-telling him of the other day; and wants me to write it out fair. ‘There’s a deal in your way of putting it,’ he says; which was perhaps, no more than the truth; ‘and a story like that shouldn’t be lost.’

‘But, sir,’ I says, ‘that sort of writing’s not so much in my line, as is registers, and signing of my

name as a church and lawful witness ; and if you was to want those little particulars written out fully, you'd best do it yourself, sir, from my unworthy lips.'

'Not at all,' he says ; and makes his request once more, and goes out up towards the Hall. Then I found afterwards that Miss Mary is much set upon getting together Copsley stories for Mr. George's pleasure ; and it was only civility that Mr. Merton—that's the new curate—should be willing to assist, even through my humble means.

He's a good man is Mr. Merton ; and knows how to respect one who, like myself, has for more than forty years held a position in the church. Being himself a model lodging-house of all the virtues, it seems hard that he should be so put to it to find a lodging in the village ; as the poet says,—

'A place wherein to dwell
And rest upon his bed.'

But it won't be at Garwood's ; where tongues is loosed as had better be kept with a bridle ; and where dead-and-gone grievances are resurrectioned with that wilfulness and constancy as might with propriety be thrown into an opposite balance. And I don't mind putting it down here, for all to see it

who choose, that bye-gones had best be bye-gones, let who will say to the contrary.

Which brings me back to my promise—for he, that is Mr. Merton, got such from me—to put down a bit of my experience, such as I gave him in the old story of Mar Topham; which is in so far like a sermon that there's an application at the end to all who may choose to take notice of the same.

Tophams wasn't Copsley by family; though now, three generations having been born, and the two first in lawful succession married and buried in church and churchyard, they may lay claim to being such. But when Beverleys and Clarkes have lived and died in a place for something like three hundred years, it falls to reason that one thinks less of that same number of generations—the hundreds left out.

It must have been before I was born that Tophams first came to Copsley, and lived as shoemaker by calling; and I wasn't far off from thirty years of age when my father died, and I came, in due course, to be his successor.

There mayn't be much in it, but you may depend there's something in a name; and that Clarkes of Copsley, being clerks by profession in

the church, didn't come together by chance: for so it has been, that as much as the Prince of Wales is born to the crown, and the eldest son at the Hall heir to the property, so, in our family, the position has gone down with the name, and—my Will being spared—will continue so to do when I am gone.

However, there they were, forty years ago, and I'm some way past seventy at this day; wondering to think of the many that's gone since then, and of the undergrowth of children—called always by the clergy 'the rising generation,' which sounds well and suitable—that has arisen to take their places. Why, it was only last Saturday, that finding the Psalms and Lessons in the desk, and my daughter-in-law being engaged in dusting the Hall-pew beneath, I stopped at the places of remembrance for the Royal family, in the Prayer-book that was new sixty years ago. 'It would be a sermon,' I says, to Eliza Anne underneath, 'if our Rector wasn't to do more than read all these names of Kings, and Queen Consorts, and Dowagers, and Princes of Waleses slowly, one by one, to tell the old what they must come to soon, and the young what's the end of all greatness;—a sermon under many heads, and those, crowned ones. Why, it's

not only scratching out that 's been here for ever so often ; it 's come to pasting over now ; and that began when the old Rector before our present couldn't be persuaded into leaving off " Our most gracious Sovereign George," after King William's time. ' Eliza Anne,' I said, and almost felt as if she was a congregation, ' the poet has well observed,—

" The paths of glory lead but to the grave ;"

and they are the very sentiments exactly that occurs to my mind in looking down on this here page, that 's got past scratching out, and come to pasting over.'

But I was speaking of forty years ago, soon after the time when I first said Amen—it being, of course, understood professional — in Copsley parish church ; and my father lying in his grave outside, instead of sitting in the clerk's seat within ; and my poor Ann, as nice a young wife and mother as ever you 'd wish to see, looking at me from the end of the aisle, and pointing little Will, that wasn't more than two, to father giving out the hymn. And that Sunday, when the banns was publishing, at which time one has opportunities of looking round and thinking to one's self, I remember the persuasion coming to me that it 's wonderful

the views of life one gets in church-registers ; and that the history of all men, and women likewise, is only that of *M* and *N* in the Prayer-book—being christened, married, visited, and in due course buried—rich and poor.

Topham, shoemaker, was a middle-aged man then, and his wife a poor shiftless body, that seemed to have so much ado to keep herself going as to have little strength left for the children's being looked after, and sent to church regular. His shop, or rather shoe-board, was handy for repairs ; although, as a matter of principle, I didn't approve of his having 'Shoemaker to his Majesty, and patronized by the nobility and gentry,' on his board.

'It's like this,' I said, putting it to him plainly,—
'you're never going to set up for having made shoes, much less boots, for his most Sacred Majesty that we're bound to honour and obey ; and, therefore, speaking honourably myself, I don't see that you can keep it up before the inhabitants that you have.'

Whereupon he makes answer in a moment, 'You prove to me that shoes, not to say boots, of mine, out of the hundreds I've made, haven't never got to St. James's, and been stood in, too, by royalty,

and I'll knock it off my board ; and it's a man's duty to hope for the best, even over shoes. For nobility, I'd like to know who repaired his lordship the Bishop's own pumps, before his man had them walking past to church—an affable gentleman as ever was to talk to. And, “Mr. Topham,” he says, “you and my master's of a trade ;” and I says, “Name it, for I'm at a loss ; unless it's that I'm at binding down and he at binding up ;” at which he laughs and says, “You're not far off ; for he's got a cure of souls, and you've got a cure of soles too.” For gentry, I suppose even you'll admit that Beverleys is such ; and I've paired and repaired for the children, and the Squire himself, for more years than there's months in a year.'

Well, you see, I couldn't prove that he hadn't, so as to stand in courts of law ; and so the board was kept up, giving him what's called the benefit of a doubt.

He had several children, that married and settled away in life ; and the youngest of all was a boy christened Martin—it being Martinmas season—but called Mar for shortness. He was his mother's child, in being puny and weakly to look at, even from his birth ; and he wasn't two years old when, waking up, and finding a little dog in his

cradle, that she—poor foolish body—had put there beside him, he took a fright, and never after was right in his wits. My poor Ann was always kind to him ; and he'd come up to our house and follow her about quite good and orderly in his ways ; and she'd have never forgiven either of our children if they'd made game of his weak, silly doings, instead of helping him to such bits of pleasure as he knew how to take. He had a little drum that I had bought him at Wethering, our nearest town ; and this took the poor lad's fancy to that extent that he'd go up and down the village half the day, beating it with all his might, and singing bits of song—for he had a sort of fancy for music—all the time ; the boys out of school hooting after him, and pursuing him sometimes, until he'd run to our house for safety, which he always found there.

There were great doings at the Park for Mr. Wilfred's coming of age ; and Mar Topham, who was getting to be a biggish boy then, wouldn't be persuaded to stay behind from the games and tents, but kept fast by my wife, beating his drum all the time in a manner that was distracting to her feelings.

‘What am I to do, William ?’ she asks of me, at last, with quite an anguish in her tone. ‘Every one

—strangers and quality and all—keeps looking at me as if he was our own ; and I can't get him away from me, or make him stop beating that everlasting drum worse than a recruiting serjeant.'

'Can't you lose him somewhere in the crowd ?' I says.

'I've tried it,' she says, 'three times : once, behind Mrs. Blackett's umbrella ; the next, near the band-master's drum ; and last of all, though she didn't know it, behind old Mrs. Swan, for her stoutness : but it's of no use. My belief is, that he'd beat his way through to me if I was hid away in Madam Beverley's own drawing-room ; and it's worse than being called by the town-crier as a lost chattel to hear him going about with his drum, and crying out, "Where's Mrs. Clarke ?"'

'His parents must be got to,' I says.

'It's no use,' she makes answer, with a sort of despair : 'I've tried that, too. I asked his mother as a favour to keep him with her ; but he wouldn't stay at any price, and was back again before I'd had time to look round. And Topham's no use. He's eating his fill in the tent ; and that poor thing can't abide the sight of his father.'

'You must be sharp with him,' I says, 'and scold n off. It's all along of your mothering him

better than them that 's his by right, that he comes after you.'

'William,' she says, 'never! It might have been our own Will that wasn't right in his head, and how should I have felt if folks had been hard on him? I'm not sure,' she said, 'whether this poor thing won't stick to me all my life as at the present; being, so to speak, like a tin-kettle fastened to a dog's tail: but it'll be better for me at the end never to remember a sharp word to such as he.' And, staring at us while we spoke, was Mar himself, who immediately began such a noise with his drum as called attention from all company present.

Mr. Adairson, the new Curate that afterwards married Miss Fanny, was standing by, and took notice of him. He was a good man—the best about that ever was at Copsley, but kept a stiff hand on himself, much as if he was his own prisoner, put on honour to be kept at hard labour for life. Well, he was standing there, not satisfied, seemingly, at finding everything going on so pleasantly; and as if thinking within himself that there ought to be some work against the grain for him to be doing, rather than enjoy life like anybody else. And having made acquaintance with me Sunday by

Sunday, for a while before, he comes up to me and says, 'How are you, Clarke?' 'Quite well, sir, I'm obliged to you,' I says; and makes bold to say, 'My wife, sir;' for Ann was a picture and a pride, not for beauty—for that she hadn't—but for a neatness and goodness that came out in every feature of her face and of her outward apparel. Whereupon she curtseys, and he shakes hands with her; for he was a gentleman through and through, that knew exactly where nodding good-natured ends and shaking begins. 'And is this one of yours?' he says, looking at Mar Topham, who had stopped drumming to stare up at him. On which my wife draws our little Will from her side, with a bit of mother's pride in his brown curls and saucy eyes, while I explains all facts concerning the other poor thing, and how he kept hanging on to her like a burr to a man's coat.

Mr. Adairson looked in a moment as if he'd got hold of a bit of his hard labour, and took to it honourable; and I could see in Ann's face a touch of feeling when Will was passed over without so much as a word, for all he shone as brave as a Beverley in his little Sunday coat and bright buttons, while the other was in his thoughts for the rest of the day.

‘I’ll try and get hold of him, Mrs. Clarke,’ he says ; ‘it’s not fit you should have all your pleasure spoilt through your own kind feelings.’ And with that he goes into the tent, and brings out some cake, and gives it bit by bit to the poor foolish fellow ; while Ann and me gets off, feeling all along how it was hardly fair to leave him on the gentleman’s hands. And all that afternoon, what with listening to his drum, and showing him plays with his fingers, and whistling to him away in a corner by himself, and saying a kind word off and on when he began to call after Ann, he kept him quiet, or, at least peaceable ; seeming to think it was no more than fitting that he shouldn’t himself have a part in any of the gay doings on the lawn, but just be taken up with a poor silly creature with none else to care for him.

The next day he comes to our house ; and goes straight in, after knocking, to my wife, with ‘Can you let me have a few words with you, Mrs. Clarke ?’ ‘As many as you please, sir,’ she says, putting a chair, and asking him to sit down.

‘Thank you all the same,’ he says, ‘but I’ll stand. I came to ask you whether any one’s tried to teach that poor, foolish boy, that you’ve been so kind to, anything better then drum-beating ; or

whether his parents have thought to make his life happier by giving him something useful to do ? ’

Well, Ann tells him all his history ; and how, unless it was for her letting him pump in the yard a bit, or rake and dig a piece of ground, kept special for him, where nothing was sown, he hadn’t learnt to turn a hand to anything, but was only just the laughing-stock of boys that didn’t know better.

‘ They ’d best let me see them at it,’ he says, looking very grim and stern, as he did at all that was contrary to right : and, sure enough, next day, a big boy that was trying to get up a persecution of Mar Topham—and he was a Garwood—found himself collared by a hand that was firm as iron, and brought without a word into the schoolmaster ; and they do say that the parson saw to his getting a flogging that was enough for that day, with something in hand to carry forward ; anyhow Mar Topham had a chance of some peace in sight of Mrs. Swan’s windows, from that time out.

Mr. Adairson went to Topham’s from my house, and asked them if nothing was to be done for the boy ?

‘ It’s little good trying to put aught into those silly brains of his,’ says Topham, working over his

last : ‘there’s enough to do to keep his fingers off the crockery and the gooseberry bushes, let alone putting them to use. It’s not that he’s silly only—he’s *mischeevious*, that’s what he is ; and if it wasn’t for his having a taste of the strap now and then when he comes nigh me, there’s not a pair of boots, making or repairing, that he wouldn’t be walking off in over the village—if it was the nobility’s own.’

‘He might learn to make baskets,’ says the Curate ; thinking not a moment of the nobility’s shoes.

‘You’re welcome to teach him,’ says Topham, with a grin ; having manners that was enough to tell any one with a bit of sight that he wasn’t of the downright old Copsley stock. ‘I’ll let you have his labour for a mere nothing ; and if you’ll take him for livery servant, I’ll ask no wages for the first year.’

Mr. Adairson stood quite grave and stern, but quiet, for all Topham’s rude speech ; and from that day he set himself as a task to win over poor Mar into a liking for him that might lead him into some ways less monkey-like than his own. He was one for strictness in the school—so the boys said ; and there was no chance of a trifier or wrong-doer getting off lightly : indeed, I’m not sure that he

Sept 16, 1941

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folks, he was just as much the other way, and they called him hard names.

But, coming back to Mar, it was only a little after Mr. Adairson had taken him up that he began to think he might turn to basket-making, and went over several times to Wethering to get notions himself, that he might begin to do the rough work in teaching him. Sometimes, even, when he hadn't time to walk, he'd hire a horse and ride over for osiers and fresh instructions, although the only horse that could be got out of the Squire's stables, fit for riding, was Robins' at the farm : and it was no end of trouble, having been just bought from an undertaker, and creeping at a snail's pace all one way, and tearing back the other at a rate that wasn't easy to be kept in, if it hadn't been for an ugly habit it had of pulling up short at publics by the roadside. The basket-work didn't come to much ; but Mr. Adairson did this for my wife, that he got Mar off her ; for the poor lad was so taken with his new friend that he couldn't be persuaded to leave him.

'Mr. Adairson, sir, begging your pardon,' I says, as he came into our house one day, Mar lurking about to catch him against he went out, 'you're giving yourself a deal of trouble for that poor lad, and I expect it's but small thanks you get from

those that should feel obligated the most.' He didn't say anything, but just went on looking at the parish map that I had brought for him out of the vestry, and finding that there was a cottage or two at odd far-away corners, that was rightly in Copsley, and ought to be visited: but after a bit he looks up in his quiet way, with his face fixed, and says, 'The Same that rebuked the Pharisees, calling them hypocrites, and casting them down to hell, was He that took compassion on the poor lad with the dumb spirit, which oftentimes cast him into the fire and into the water. The battle of one's life, that's against hypocrisy and self-indulgence, has time in it to pick up such as lie wounded by the way.'

They seemed strong words out of the pulpit, and just in my poor cottage; but they wern't spoken to me, or even to Ann, but to himself, as if he hadn't known of us being present: as, indeed, I think he had forgotten where he was altogether; for after a minute thinking to himself, he looks up quite surprised at seeing us two standing by, and says, 'I beg your pardon!' and goes out, Mar giving a sort of sound that was between a hoot and a yell, for pleasure at seeing him come to light again.

Well, the poor fellow, as I said, got a way of fol-

lowing the parson ; and when he did it the most was at buryings, for marriage folk wouldn't have him. As regular as a funeral came up the church avenue, and Mr. Adairson stood in his surplice to meet them, Mar would come up behind the mourners, making as if he belonged to them. Often I said to him to keep away, and Ann would even now and then tempt him into the house by a bit of bread and honey ; but somehow before she could turn round he'd be off ; and he'd got into a way of singing out an Amen that wasn't unlike my own, which made it the more unreasonable that he should be there. I suppose we grow not to mind things at last, however ; and as time went on, I didn't make so much objection, only feeling anxious that he should keep quiet and down at the end of the church : while many folks in other villages called him 'Copsley mourner,' and 'chief mute,' and other names which he, poor fellow, couldn't understand.

'What are you doing ?' he says to me one day while I was digging.

'Making a hole,' I says, thinking it wrong to put more gloomy thoughts into his poor head than was there of their own accord.

'Deep ?' he says.

‘Yes,’ I answer; ‘very deep.’

And after that he’d come constant to me at my work, and say, ‘Deep—deep—deep,’ until, as I said to Ann, it gave one a kind of shivers to hear him.

It was just at that time that she, poor body, was beginning to fail; although she didn’t give in to the disease that was to eat away her life for a long time, fighting manfully, or—what’s a deal more—womanfully, against it. And we two—Will and Sophy being asleep—were sitting together over the fire; she, as always, busy with her needle, and I, thinking between whiffs of my pipe, and letting out stray news with the flowings of thought.

‘Mr. Blackett’—that was steward then—‘looked in to-day,’ I says, ‘while I was in the church; and the family’s coming back to-morrow.’

‘Then I reckon Miss Fanny’ll be down to see the children on Friday,’ says Ann: ‘she always comes down to us the first thing—Sophy being so fond of her.’

‘There’s others fond of her besides Sophy,’ I says; ‘and it’s my opinion that Mr. Wilfred’s coming of age won’t be the last merry-making up at the Hall, though that’s two years gone by now.’

‘If it’s as you think,’ says my wife, looking wise, ‘there’ll be no merry-making, but everything as quiet and plain as going to church ordinary. Mr. Adairson would rather give the money to the poor by a great deal, than have feast and frolic for marriage of his.’

‘You’re maybe right,’ I says, thinking; ‘for it’d be more in his line : and I reckon Miss Fanny will find things different where he’s taking her to, up in the North, to what she’s been accustomed here in her old home.’

Ann didn’t say; for her thoughts had gone off on another line, which women’s minds do travel on unaccountably often : and after a minute she begins again,—‘What a pleasant day *we* had, William, when we was wed ! I wouldn’t wish Miss Fanny a pleasanter.’

‘Yes,’ I makes answer; ‘for all we wasn’t well off, so to speak, in the world.’

‘We had enough, William,’ she says, ‘and knowledge is better than riches ; as the cross-sticks that our schoolmaster at Wethering gave me, puts forward.’

‘Acrostic,’ I threw in.

‘But there’s two of them,’ she says; ‘and they’re better than samplers for reminding one of one’s duty

in all one's ways. Besides that, as poetry they're improving to the mind; and I'm beginning to teach the first to Will.'

My wife's former schoolmaster at Wethering thought a deal of her goodness, if not of her schooling; for she was always more for women's crafts and handiworks than for books or ciphering; and quicker at thoughts than at putting them in writing. The day before her wedding, he had sent her a present very suitable and well thought of, which was acrostics, all in poetry of his own composition, on her name and mine, framed and glazed, and with many pen flourishes and up-and-down strokes forming themselves into a border, which again came into the form of a heart, as appropriate in every respect for an ornament at the bottom. They were much thought of in the family at the time, and in Copsley parish afterwards—more than one, indeed, putting it to me as a matter of feeling more than of expense, whether there wasn't lines in them equal to an epitaph; and poor Robins, whose wife's name was Ann, going so far as to have the three lines written on my wife's Christian name put upon her tomb, which all took as very considerate and forgiving, Ann Robins having been noted for a scold. But, in my experience, I've often seen it that way—

that the points most trying in a person's life are the very ones that affectionate survivors often look the most tenderly upon afterwards.

The lines were as follows :—

AN ACROSTIC.

W isdom with probity, O man, combine !
I n future life true excellence be thine !
L earning, e'en more than wealth, exalt thy state !
L ove's soothing charms thy constancy await !
I n peaceful harmony thy life be past ;
A dmired by all where'er thy lot is cast :
M atured experience ripening to the last.

C are take their flight, nor tarry at thy door !
L aments be hush'd thy pitying glance before !
A ffecion's voice make hours of danger bright !
R emembrance bring to age youth's glowing light !
K ing George himself, with sceptre and on throne,
E nvies thy lot, and would it were his own,

And remain, sir,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN BOWMAN.

May 27th, 18—.

Ann always said there was a majesty about some of the lines that struck her mind a good deal. And, indeed, when our little Will was christened, and after we had come home, she took down the

frame and read them out over him, saying to me that it was wonderful to think of our unconscious babe growing up into that, though being 'admired by all where'er his lot was cast' was a beginning. 'But it's strong that about King George,' she says, thinking; 'because, you see, it's not as if we was handy to London, and he knowing all about you and how good you are.'

'And, my dear,' I says, 'that's what's called a poetical license, and is much a mark of true poetry—not copied or second-hand—as the mark that's on our six teaspoons, that the Squire's lady gave you when we were married, is for real silver. It comes to this, that if His most Sacred Majesty was passing by, and was pleased to look in in a friendly manner, taking notice all round, he'd find everything so much to his liking, and my chair so much easier than his throne, that he wouldn't ask for anything more—not to say that he'd get an admiration for you immediate.'

'William,' she says, 'that last is nonsense. Mr. Bowman knew what he was about when he put the wisdom and learning and experience into your scale, and left the cakes and linen and stocking-mending for mine, which are altogether more within my reach; and, indeed, I couldn't wish anything more

than to come up to his views put forward continually in those terms before my eyes.'

Which reminds me that hers ran accordingly :—

AN ACROSTIC.

A woman tender, virtuous, resign'd,
N o waste allowing and no thought unkind,
N e'er drives, but wins, her partner to her mind.

C akes she will add unto her household store ;
L inen so white such ne'er was bleached before ;
A pples preserve, and other fruits likewise,
R estoring garments, and constructing pies.
K nowledge she'll gather from her husband's lips,
E 'en as a bee the honey'd nectar sips.

And remain, madam,

Your obedient servant,

JOHN BOWMAN.

May 27th, 18—.

'That about the bee and flowers is a license, too I suppose?' she says, looking it over that same christening morning. 'The silver mark on the teaspoons again, isn't it?'

'Which exactly is so,' I says, answering; for if I've given thought to one point in my profession more than another, it's the poetry of it: 'and it's all been as true as a prophecy about the cakes and

linen, and the "tender, virtuous, resign'd," not left out.'

But returning to Miss Fanny, that we was talking of that evening when the acrostics came up in conversation, two days hadn't passed before she was down at our house, with a woolly sheep in her basket for Sophy, and a dog that barked, and woolly likewise, for Will. And my wife was as pleased to see her as possible; and makes her kindly welcome, asking for the Squire and Madam Beverley, and anxious to know of Miss Fanny's own good health.

'Oh, I'm quite well thank you, Ann,' she says, playing with Sophy's curls, whom she had taken to her lap; and then stopped. At last she gives a kind of a half sigh, and begins talking to Sophy, who, as a matter of course, couldn't understand; but which is the handiest way possible for letting out news that isn't just straight and plain talked of to a third party present.

'Will you come with me away to the North, little woman?' she says.

Whereupon Ann asks if it is so, and hearing it, wishes her joy. 'And my dear young lady,' she says, 'there's many sick and poor here to tell of Mr. Adairson's goodness.'

‘ I know it,’ says Miss Fanny, lighting up ; ‘ and it’s his goodness that makes me feel how happy I shall be with him. You’ve never been up in the North, have you, Ann ? ’ she says.

‘ Never, ma’am, further north than Maidstone, which is ten miles higher up the map than Copsley. You’ll be going far, then, Miss Fanny ? ’

‘ Yes,’ she says, and the tears, my wife told me, came up to her eyes ; ‘ but there are many stray, needy people up there, and few to look after them ; and Mr. Adairson says that it’s his call, and we must think first of that. I hope, Ann,’ she says, for she was very fond of my good woman, ‘ I hope I shan’t be a hindrance to him.’

‘ No fear of that, my dear young lady,’ Ann makes reply : ‘ only don’t you go overtaking yourself, but remember that your own health’s none of the strongest. And when must we look to lose you ? ’ she goes on ; ‘ for Copsley folks will miss you sorely, and the children that you’ve cared for so.’

‘ We talk of next month,’ says she, ‘ but it’s not quite fixed. I had thought,’ she goes on, hesitating a bit, ‘ of—of having a feast in the park for the children ; and games, perhaps ; and a tent, like on Mr. Wilfred’s birthday ; but Mr. Adairson says, better not ; and I’m sure he’s right. He wishes the

money to be given to things for the sick, which will be much better than any folly ; and you and your husband must be sure and tell us if any such come to your knowledge. Mr. Adairson thinks,' she says, with a half smile, 'that I'm too much given to spoiling the children ;' and, playing again with Sophy, she adds, 'I couldn't help bringing down the baa baa white sheep for our little woman here though.'

My wife told me all this over our supper that evening ; and 'William,' she says, 'the Copsley folk won't like there being nothing to mark such a great thing as a Hall marriage. And what's more,' she says, 'I don't like the banns themselves. Miss Fanny's not the sort of stuff for fighting her way as Mr. Adairson would, who'd see it right to break down a path through a hedge rather than go in at a gate. She's just as gentle and easily led as a child ; and it's because Mr. Adairson talks so much above her, and is so fixed to give himself no peace, that she admires him so. But, William, it's from afar off—not like I felt to you.'

We thought a deal about her ; for all Copsley folk set store by the Hall young lady, and would look after Mr. Adairson going up the avenue, so grave and thoughtful for any one courting, and

hope he'd take care of her that was to be his wife : but never was anything so quiet as it all went on ; and he was busier than ever teaching Mar Topham, and keeping the schoolboys in order, and looking after the sick, up to the very day before the wedding.

He had got it all his own way with her parents ; and there wasn't to be company, or carriages, or anything but such as might have been for a farmer's daughter, the people said.

Mrs. Swan let it fall afterwards that she had gone so far as to wish there might be a fine day, prophesying of health and happiness ; upon which she felt cut short when he made answer that it would be whatever weather was right, and little mattered in so serious a thing as marriage. Also, that health and happiness were well-sounding to talk of, but that often the truest good lay behind sickness and disappointment.

' Which is all very well and suitable to say in a sermon,' says Mrs. Swan, half angry ; ' but for a bridegroom it sounds as dismal as the winds of winter.'

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When the day did come, it turned out as wet as Mr. Adairson himself could have wished ; and the little bit of a flower-arch, which I had ventured to

put up without leave over the church porch, was all draggled and dripping. All the Copsley people, however, were there to see; and quite a murmur there was when Miss Fanny came up in the Hall carriage with her father and mother, Mr. Wilfred and Mr. Harry having come on before, looking just as natural as if she had gone out for an airing as usual, and with nothing particular on, my wife said, to mark her wedding-day, but her white bonnet and veil, and a white shawl over a dove-coloured silk dress.

‘She might have been a widder, and he her second,’ said several standing by in a sort of whisper. But there was true love—though, as Ann had said, of the far-off sort—and admiration of her husband, in her face as she glanced up to him; and a sort of catching of the fixed, resolved look that was in his, only with more tenderness.

I hadn’t well brought out the first Amen, before I heard another to match it from close behind the bridegroom; and there was Mar Topham, whom they had wanted to turn out of the church, but Mr. Adairson wouldn’t allow it, and who was standing close behind him, looking a queer-enough sort of a groomsman. And when the last words were said, and Miss Fanny, that was now Mrs. Adairson,

had signed in the vestry, he comes up to me with a grin, and, 'Master,' says he, 'have you dug deep for them yet?' and I, trying to silence him with a frown, was caught sight of by Mr. Adairson himself, who must have heard him, as he swung down the aisle to look at the carriage and horses, saying, 'Deep! deep! very deep!' though he took no notice.

They were a handsome couple to look at as they came down the aisle, for all the wedding was so different from what might have been expected; and as she came by the font, our Sophy, that was only four years old, came up to the bride with a little bunch of flowers that my wife had arranged, to put into her hand; and she took them, and stooped down to kiss her, which was Miss Fanny all over, and the tears were up in her eyes as she waved her hand to us all in driving away.

We never saw either of them any more at Copsley; and when the news came of her death, leaving a little boy three years old—that's Mr. Robin now—I thought of the words that foolish lad had spoken, and they seemed almost like what people call an omen.

But all this is only in the way to the story of Mar Topham, which I seem always a-coming to,

and run off into something else; like a river that makes twenty miles of the distance which comes exactly to five as the crow flies.

After Mr. Adairson was gone, he went about in a low way, and worse than ever for sticking to one; and I was much concerned lest he should take to my Ann again, who wasn't strong, and had enough to do with our own two, but who never had the heart to shut the door against him, as it said truly of her, 'a woman tender, virtuous, resign'd.'

But just then it so happened that Mrs. Swan's daughter, that had married young Robins a year before, came to live with her mother; her husband being engaged as Squire's carpenter, which was as good a post as a man need wish for. And she hadn't been there two months before a little one was born, that was brought to be christened by the name of Angela Josephine Matilda. I don't approve, myself, of that run of names in our line of life. Good working names, such as Ann and Betsy, and Jane and Sarah, for girls, matching Thomas and William, which the poet in the hymn puts forward as suitable for boys, are a deal more to the purpose, besides being less trouble to the parson to register afterwards. Only a week ago, a foolish couple—Garwoods as usual—that had been catch-

ing up African stories by the wrong end, brought their youngest to be called Gorilla : and if it hadn't been for Mr. Merton's being a considerate gentleman, and thinking not only that it wasn't a Christian name, but what a trial for her after, that poor unfortunate child would have gone through the world a laughing-stock to all society. As he couldn't get them to change it of their own accord, he takes advantage of their want of ears, and christens her Corilla ; which isn't so bad after all ; and which, being written so in the register with a C, is her true and lawful name, as I shall be ready to testify if needful.

But to return to Mar Topham, which I've said six times at the least, going off always at points of interest, it was odd enough that living close by, and seeing Angela Josephine Matilda Robins in her mother's arms, he takes a fancy to the baby, which is more than men does mostly ; and wants to hold her. She was always a simple, good-natured girl, was Molly Swan, then Mrs. Robins ; and Mar coming up quite gentle and quiet, and holding out his hands for the baby, she, thinking little of it, lays it right in his arms. She told my wife afterwards that such a turn she had never had before, as on seeing Mar carry off 'the lovely innocent'—which

was her own expression—full swing down the garden walk; chuckling over it in a manner that made it too astonished to cry, but only open its eyes as black and wide as possible.

She had sense not to run after him at the first, and, after a minute, to meet him quietly by the other walk; but couldn't see him nowhere, until, hearing him inside the summer-house that's by the cabbage-bed, with French beans running up to form it in the season, she looks in, and there he was, the baby in his arms, and he rocking it as gently as a cradle, and singing in a queer sort of way, which no doubt Angela Josephine admired, for she had a smile on her face, and was as pleased as possible.

'Laughing!' says Mar, pointing to the baby and proud of his success; which, indeed, was such as many a man, with all his senses within call, can't compass. And Molly Robins, though all of a flutter, pats Mar on the shoulder, and sets the baby playing at him, and then gets him a bit of bread and meat; for, as she observes to my wife after, 'there's no knowing with that sort if, being put out with one, they won't take revenge on the baby.'

As it was, however, that day was the beginning of Mar Topham's taking to Robins' baby; and

Molly, at last, found him quite handy for holding it : so much, indeed, that he got to be called Mrs. Fred Robins' nursemaid.

'Two innocents together,' Ann used to say, seeing him walk up and down by the hour, the baby used to him and his ways, and he proud in a sort of way of being a protection to anything. He never seemed to tire of it either, as most would ; but when it crowed, would bring it across to the first person coming by, with a joyful look in his eyes, and say, 'Talking ! talking !' Now and then he'd bring it into church, when there was a burying, and he thought himself wanted for the Amens ; and would hush it off quite quiet, like any mother.

His manners to it, put in words, were like this :—' I'm a poor silly fellow, and don't do nothing right before the world ; but you, little one, believes in me, and don't know that I'm not the same as those that have all their wits. And we two are pretty much of a muchness as far as that goes, though I'm strongest ; and you don't know enough to laugh at me, and make game of me as boys do ; and so we'll stick to each other friendly, and I'll be always good to you.'

He had a little song, caught up nobody knew

where, that he used to sing to a bit of a psalm tune, which he must have heard in church, and 'adapted to the purpose,' as the organist at Wethering would say. It was like this :—

‘ Little baby we will go,
Some one day,
Over the mountains and over the snow,
Far away.’

And this was heard up and down the village, and in the churchyard; and often he'd be sitting on a gravestone, and singing, 'Over the mountains and over the snow,' the baby listening quite admiring, and thinking it lovely to hear.

Well, the time went on, and it was some way past Christmas, when late one night a knock came at the door, and there was Robins himself, all of a hurry. 'Mrs. Clarke,' he says, 'will you please to come over the way to my wife; for mother-in-law's off at Wethering, and Molly's in a dreadful state, Angela being took ill.'

Ann was off directly; and there was Molly kneeling by the baby, and crying as if her heart would break, and the poor little thing looking quite waxen and stiff already, it's hands clenched fast in a fit. My wife had it in a warm bath

in a minute ; and it revived a little, and at last got better ; and by the time the doctor came, was smiling again. He said it was teething-time, and it would go hard with it. ‘ Ah, Mrs. Clarke,’ he says, ‘ they’re a trouble pretty much from the cradle to the grave,’ meaning teeth. ‘ But sometimes a blessing, sir,’ she makes answer, taking him wrong, and meaning children.

Little Angela wasn’t to live, however, to be a blessing to her parents ; for the fits came on again two nights after, and she was gone in one of them past recovery.

Poor Molly was dreadfully cut up ; and Robins himself, though a slow man, took it to heart more than might have been expected for so young a child : for it’s the grown-up daughters that goes most to fathers’ hearts when they’re taken—the grief for the little ones seeming to come by right to the mothers.

But I’m not sure whether there wasn’t one who felt it deeper than either father or mother. They couldn’t get Mar Topham to understand that he mightn’t have the baby to play with ; and it was pitiful to hear him calling ‘ Baby ! baby !’ outside the house with the blinds drawn down. We did our best to keep him from standing there, and

tried to get up an amusement for him at our own place, in heaping the snow on one side down the path ; but it was no good.

Molly, at last, with her eyes flowing down, calls him in, and leads him up to where the little thing was lying in its coffin, with a few early snow-drops on its breast ; and he wants directly to take her in his arms. 'No, Mar,' she says, with a bit of authority that he always heeded from the child's mother ; 'mustn't touch.' And then the poor lad begins a sort of a howling, like a dog that's wounded and she couldn't pacify him anyhow.

There's a danger of one in my position getting hardened to seeing grief and sorrow, and to thoughts of death and burial ; but a word that Mr. Adairson spoke on that very subject once has often come to me since, when I've found myself taking things lightly that had to do with my profession. 'Clarke,' he says, 'the One that knew human sorrow deeper than all that ever lived, was He that never saw it without feeling for it as if it was His own. You and I,' he says, 'have to meet it continually ; let us mind that it makes our hearts tender ; for if not, it'll make them harder and harder.' Now, if there's one thing that would grieve me ; it would be growing hard of heart ; and, looking at it from his point of

view, I've often since said to myself, lying down at night, 'William Clarke, how's that heart of yours? Not hardened yet, I hope!'

But the hardest must have had a feeling for that funeral party that came up the church way the next Saturday, waiting under the lych-gate for the parson. There was the little coffin, with its white covering, carried by four of the school-girls, that were friends of Molly's, and had been kind to the baby; and then poor Molly, crying as if her heart would break for her only one; and Robins, looking sorrowful, and as if he'd be glad to do the same, but terrible shy, and wishing he could go alone, and have it out by himself. And lastly, old Robins and old Mrs. Swan; making up the three generations; but the reverse way from what they mostly come to funerals—the last being carried first now, and next the grave.

I've heard folks speak lightly of a baby's death. 'They won't miss one of such a many,' they'll say; or, 'Only a baby's grave;' or, 'It's best as it is:' which may be true in a way. But my heart'll have to be laid, and left till called for, in that spring I've heard tell of in the North, that turns all to stone, before I'd speak lightly of a little one's being taken. One of ours, God bless it! was taken at three months; and I knew then what it felt as a

father, although sure it was better off. But it wasn't I, it was my wife, that it fell upon like to break her heart. She didn't make much outward lamentation; but it went in the deeper; and her voice had a quiet about it for ever so long, that was fit to melt any one living with her. I remember how she used to take the other two to the green mound over where our little Fanny was, and tell them to be good children and meet her after: and one day, when the chapter was read in the Revelations about the multitudes in white robes, my eye fell upon her from my desk, and there she was, bent down to hide her weeping, though it was a year gone by. And afterwards she says, 'William, joy and sorrow was in my heart so when that chapter was read, that I couldn't keep them down. I thought of our little one there, with the palm in her hand, and before the throne, in white apparel; and, William, I wouldn't have wished her back. And I thank Him that's brought me to say as much; for I haven't felt to be able to say that before.'

Poor Molly, who had a tender heart of her own, kept looking down when all was over, as if longing to do something more for hers; and when they were all gone, and the Curate off with his surplice, and I, filling up as fast as I could that bitter cold day,

Mar Topham comes up to me with the look in his face like a wounded dog, that was, all the same, more human than the grin which he had generally.

‘Deep,’ he says ; ‘deep—deep—very deep !’

I nodded, and he stood by watching ; and as the wind came icily up, as keen as a razor, he would shudder now and then—poor fellow, his clothing wasn’t of the warmest ! for Tophams are always shiftless folk—and say, ‘Cold ! cold !’ to which I nodded again.

When my work was done, and I took up the things to put them in the tool-house, he came away too, hanging about in a dumb anguished sort of manner, that went to one’s heart more, even, than Molly’s tears ; and as I turned home, I heard that kind of a howl down the church path, which went on in my ears all the evening, as I thought of the poor lad, with the one thing he cared for in the world laid five feet underground.

Late on in the evening, Robins himself knocks at the door, and comes in ; and my wife, always keen to feel for folks in trouble, makes him no end of welcome, more especially as Fred (for so he was called, to distinguish him from his father) was a good, steady, honest fellow, and as well-meaning a lad as ever breathed.

‘How’s Molly?’ says Ann, making him comfortable by the fire.

‘She’s taking on dreadful,’ he says, dismally. ‘Poor girl! I thought to make it better for her by getting it all over so soon; but one never knows women, and sometimes the things one means best turns out worst. She seems to feel more, now there’s nothing but the empty house, than before to-day.’

We sat quiet, looking at the fire, till he broke silence again. ‘I mustn’t stay,’ he says, ‘my poor girl being so low; though, for the matter of that, nothing new comes handy to say; and I’ve tried to cheer her up, by putting it to her over and over that it’s best for it—poor little dear—and that it mayn’t be our last: but, “O Fred,” she says, “don’t you remember her eyes, that was so laughing when you come home from work?” or, “think upon her pretty ways, and how she’d say, ‘Goo, goo, goroo!’ at you when you was dancing of her up and down, such as I never knew baby say before, nor shall again?” Which is all true; for she *was* just as bright and crowing as a young bird waking up in the morn.’ And he stopped again, while my wife put a cup of hot coffee down by us both, which she was famous for making, and which was comforting that cold night.

‘Master Clarke,’ he says, beginning again, ‘I’ve promised Molly a bit of a head-stone, with her name and birth, and something to it ; and that’s what I’ve come over about, to ask your opinion on the same.’

‘She were scarce a year old,’ I says ; ‘and it all costs a bit, besides fee to the Rector.’

‘I know it,’ he makes reply ; ‘and perhaps, to my way of thinking, just a bit of a hillock would be enough, and all that would be best. But Molly’s of a different way of thinking, poor girl ; and I’d never be the one to stand in the way of her feelings ; and I’m earning good wages, so I promised to come over and see you upon it. You’d know a deal the best what would be most according to custom, and yet particular, to please Molly.’

‘Well, there’s a deal of difference in tastes,’ I says ; ‘but I’d be glad to counsel according to my ability, beyond which I can’t undertake.’

‘Thank you kindly,’ he says. ‘To begin : there’s first the name.’

‘How much of it ?’ I makes inquiry.

‘All four,’ he replies. ‘Written out in full, it comes to Angela Josephine Matilda Robins, whereby she was christened lawful in the parish church.’

‘Yes, I know,’ I says ; ‘it was all lawful as far

as that goes. So was those of the princess in Spain, that Mr. Blackett made mention to me of in conversation, that had such a string that a page of 'em was put in the papers, and at the bottom,—“To be continued in our next.” They're all lawful, as far as that goes, and would have made a handle to be married by; but every one's one more for graving.'

'I know it,' he answers, sighing; 'and I'm sorry now that Molly was set upon so many; and 'wouldn't hear of its being plain Jane. But I wouldn't leave out one now—not if she didn't like.'

'Then there's where she was born and died,' I says; 'which is all clear, and would be enough, after mention made of parents.'

'No,' he says, 'it wouldn't be enough without something to it with a feeling in it. Molly'd never be satisfied else.'

'My father had this book, and grandfather before me,' I says, taking down one kept for the purpose of friendly counsel in such matters; 'and I've made additions, which will come down to Will in his turn, when he'll be thinking of mine. They're copies of most in our churchyard, monuments in the church included; and I've put down many from round about, and one or two of my own com-

posing, that have been thought highly of ; and such as was mentioned to me further by the clerk of Wethering. Putting aside sculptures, of which a lily, near on upside down, is considered most appropriate in 'the case of infants, there's one opened upon here that's in Bonham churchyard, over the hill,—'

*"Swift was the infant's course to death from birth:
He left his mother's lap for that of earth."*

'That was a *he*,' says Robins ; 'not a little *she* like ours : besides, it's for all little 'uns the same that dies ; nought special for ours. That was different to the rest.'

'"Afflictions sore,"' I says, 'is common ; over and above not being suitable for tender years—not to say months.'

'Yet there's a feeling in it,' he says ; 'and it's true : Dr. Dawkins *was* in vain.'

'But it wasn't "long time,"' I answers, putting him off from that. 'Further on there's

"Oft as the bell with solemn toll,"

and that's what's made me many and many a time stop to think, even though it's myself that's tolled it ; for, sure enough, it's a warning voice, especially when one's always a-fearing to get hardened.'

‘ But that ’s on many,’ he answers, ‘ and nothing particular for our little one.’

‘ You speak truly,’ I goes on, looking down the page over such as followed. ‘ Dr. Green’s,’ I says, ‘ that died in my father’s days at Wethering ;—no, that ’s only “ He survived all his patients,” which was a remarkable fact, and worthy of notice : but, of course, wouldn’t be suitable out of the profession ; though in that line it ’s to the point.’

‘ There ’s little feeling there, either,’ he answers.

‘ Here ’s one that was thought much of, I goes on, when it was a question of Madam Stormount having a monument here—the lawyer’s lady at Wethering, in my grandfather’s time, who was famous for her learning :—

*“ Mistress Jane Stormount, friend, is now no more :
She died at Wethering, age-d fifty-four :
Languages dead and living she acquired,
And died respected as she lived admired.
Earth’s living tongues she nêr will speak again ;
The dead alone upon her lips remain.”*

The family—grandchildren and great-grandchildren—comes still to read it ; and there ’s no doubt it was well-turned as a remembrance of her learning, which was much beyond the common.’

‘ Angela means angel,’ says poor Robins, look-

ing through with me, and pointing down the page bit by bit with his big rough finger ; ‘at least, so I’ve been told. Isn’t there something about angels in poetry amongst all these ? That ‘would suit Molly,’ he says, as faithful as possible to what she’d say or think. ‘Here’s one in a single line ; which wouldn’t come to much either :—

“Waft her, angels, to the skies.”

What do you think of that, now ?’ he says, turning to my wife.

‘I’ll tell you what to say to Molly, with my love,’ says Ann, putting down her knitting, and looking full at him. ‘Tell her that I once lost a little one, that’s now with the palm in her hand, and before the throne ; and for all she’s as fair now as the angels, I’m sure I’ll know her when I get there too. I didn’t want no monument over her,’ she goes on quite earnest like. ‘The grass mound is monument enough, and there’s God’s handwriting on it, which is His own wild flowers, saying that as they rise from their seeds so she, too, will rise again ; and her name’s enough written on my heart. But there was a word spoken long ago by Him who raised up the little daughter, which is written there, too, under her name ; and it

was just this,—“She is not dead but sleepeth.” And that brought me comfort, when I felt as Molly does, and she was buried out of my sight; and if you want for words to put under her name, put those ones, and they’ll bring comfort to her, too, poor dear! for there’s waking comes after sleep.’

Robins listened all through; and when she had done, gets up, and says, ‘I’ll tell her exactly what you says, Mrs. Clarke, and thank you kindly. One good woman knows the feel of another better than us men, and handles such feelings more appropriate.’ And with that he goes out; and my wife, looking after him, observes on his being as kind-hearted, leadable a young husband as any in the parish; while I keeps saying to myself over and over, ‘A woman tender, virtuous, resign’d.’

Next morning we was scarce done breakfast when our little Will—a sharp boy for six years—comes running in as important as possible, and, ‘Father,’ he says, ‘there’s folks calling out for you, and ever such a noise in the churchyard!’

‘What’s up?’ I says.

‘It’s the little baby that was buried yesterday in the churchyard,’ he makes answer, all out of breath; ‘and some one’s been in the night and took it away!’

‘The boy’s out of his senses!’ I says; putting on my Sunday-coat, though, all the time, and asking him if he was sure he had them about him. But I hadn’t to wait long before Robins, himself, comes in all of a hurry, and without knocking; and with quite an angry look in his red, good-natured face.

‘Master Clarke,’ he says, ‘you won’t deceive me, I knows, having no reason; for I wished, and so did Molly, to do everything that was right along of our poor little one that was taken. You can’t give me a notion who’s been doing us this harm? for I’m that hurt I don’t say what I mightn’t do, meeting him.’

‘I’ve heard nought of what’s the matter,’ I says; ‘only my Will has this moment come running in with some cock-and-bull story that can’t be true.’

‘But it *is* true!’ he says, quite fierce: ‘it *is* true! and there’s the little coffin lying broken open that I made myself, and lined extra, for our little one; and the bits of snow-drops poor Molly had put in, scattered on the ground, and not a trace to tell, for the snow’s fallen fresh, who’s been doing of it.’

‘What did he do it with?’ I says, thinking of my tools, and whether they’d been meddled with.

‘There’s your own spade and pick lying in the snow, too,’ says Robins; ‘and the lock’s been broken in with the handle of one or other; and, what’s more, the little one that looked so pretty and sweet’s not to be heard of—even the children, who always hears of things first, knowing nothing.’

‘Perhaps it’s a wolf,’ suggests Will, highly excited, and listening with great attention: ‘there’s pictures of them in my book, father, eating of little children.’

‘No,’ says Robins, taking him as if he’d been quite a reasoner grown up, ‘there’s not such here—not even bears, such as once ate up forty-and-two on ’em. And it’s too deep for an animal: not to say the lock being broken.’

By this time we was both walking as fast as possible to the place; and I scarce could believe my sight, seeing the little grave, all finished up fresh and orderly the day before, broken up now in confusion, the snow having filled up the place where the coffin was laid. There was a number of folks gathering to look in, and the children collecting as they always do; and one said one thing, and one another, but no one was able to give a true report, or any clue to the doer of that night’s work. Molly had been there, they said, but had been got home,

crying and angry by turns, poor thing ! with the bitterness of sorrow that was laid quiet to sleep being raked up, and held before her again in such rude fashion.

There was nothing to be said, beyond all sorts of stories that came out one upon another round the empty grave—one telling of a lady resurrectioned for her rings, another, of sextons being paid by doctors, which it was beneath me to listen to ; and another, of some folks having heard of the proud lady of Beverley being about of late ; though she wasn't likely to condescend to trouble that poor little innocent Robins.

By-and-bye the Rector himself comes down, hearing the report. And, ' Clarke,' he says, ' can you give me any opinion about this very distressing circumstance ?'

' None, sir,' I says. ' The last I sees of this place was yesterday at three o'clock, when it was filled in, and mounded over, and all left straight as should be.'

' And there was nothing of value inside,' he says, thinking to himself.

And just as he said it, there was Molly come back to the place, almost out of herself. ' Nothing of value, sir!' she cries, almost passionate ; ' nothing

of value! No, there wasn't—only my baby! Only my little one that was so sweet and pretty! Only my child! It was of value to me, sir,' she says—'to me and to her father: but no, of course not: nothing of value to no one else.'

'Hush, Molly, there's a dear! and go home,' says her husband, his hand on her shoulder. 'Go home to mother, *do*; and I'll see to it: so will all besides.'

'He says there was nothing of value,' she goes on, scarcely knowing what she was about: 'but she was a jewel worth all to me.'

And with that, up comes my own wife through the snow, herself looking worn and white; and, seeing how it was, puts her arm motherly round poor Molly, and says, 'Come along, my dear, with me; and leave Fred and Clarke to see to it; and we'll think what's best to be done. Come to my house, and have something to warm you.'

And there was that in Ann that carried all along with her, for all she was so gentle; and poor Molly was quieted down and went away; while the Rector, looking quite dumb-founded after her, began to make fresh inquiry.

'You didn't see any one about, Clarke?' he goes on to ask.

‘No one, sir,’ I makes answer ; ‘unless it was that poor silly lad of Topham’s : but he’s always about for grave-diggings, and has been for years.’

‘He wouldn’t have that much purpose in him,’ he says, thinking ; ‘and besides, there’d be no object in his doing it, even if he could.’

‘The coffin itself’s the only thing any one could possibly have thought on who did it for thieving,’ says some one else ; ‘and that’s all that’s left.’

Robins, meantime, was standing moody there, looking in ; and at last comes up to the Rector, and says, ‘I knows, sir, that you feels for us. Will you please to advise me what’s to be done, and I’ll do it straightways. One thing I’m resolved upon—I’ll not give up till it *is* found out.’

‘Well, my good fellow,’ says the Rector, who was always kind and well-respected, poor old gentleman ! and who was missed in coals and flannel for many a day after he was took, ‘I tell you plainly, I never was much more puzzled in my life, and never more sorry than for you and poor Molly. I’d have you give notice to Styles the watchman, and all the places about searched where such a thing could lie hidden :—that’s about as much as I can think of now ; and Clarke’ll help you to see to them.

We'll have notices on the church-door and on the pump ; and a reward offered—that 'll be my affair ; and if these do no good, we must try further measures. It is, indeed, a truly distressing circumstance.'

Robins touched his hat. 'Thank you kindly, sir,' he says ; 'I know'd you 'd feel for us.'

'Stay,' says the Rector, turning back as he was walking off: 'here, Robins!' and he speaks in a low tone, so that none was able to hear but him and me; 'you haven't had any quarrel with any man, have you?—or a bit of a grudge? One hardly likes to think any one could be so unfeeling; but still, you know, that *might* account for it.'

Fred spoke up, however, quite loud in answer—'Not against no man, sir—that's to say, no *man*; and as for the others, why it's got nothing to do with this.'

'Quite sure?' says the Rector: 'it's important to know.'

'Quite, sir,' says Robins, thinking, as if taking up an inventory in his conscience: 'there's not a soul but mother-in-law as has got ought against me, as I know on; and that's along of boots, and the print of my mug on the table. She *do* say I'm a trial along of them, coming home from the wet lanes, and gives it me sometimes; but since our poor

little one died, she's never troubled me, not a word : and besides that, there's nothing.'

'That won't help us much,' says the Rector, going off again; while I went my ways to see about the church stoves, thinking deeply over all things that had passed.

While I was busy about them, up comes Mar Topham, shivering over the fire.

'Cold!' he says, shaking all over : 'cold ! cold !'

'Yes, it's cold enough,' I makes answer; and then, with a sudden thought, asks him, 'Mar, do you know what's come of the baby ?'

But all I could get from him was his usual churchyard cry, 'Deep, deep—very deep!' with a scared, troubled looked in his poor foolish face; and then, after a time, a sort of nod, with a signification that I felt it, too, as he said, 'Cold—cold—cold !'

There was a fairish congregation at church that morning; folks thinking that the Rector might give out, or throw in, something to the purpose; but he didn't do that. Only on the church-doors was two great posters, one in his own handwriting, and the other in the schoolmaster's, showing that the sacrilegious disinterment of a child had taken place in the churchyard of Copsley parish by some person, or persons, unknown; and that any information

leading to the finding of the perpetrators would be rewarded.

Of course, people were all gathering round the doors to discourse upon it—Robins himself, however, with his black band on his hat, getting off as fast as he could, after looking it over, as if it troubled him to hear talk ; and eager, besides, to go on seeking for any signs of the poor baby. Then they went to the empty grave, and looked in ; as if, after all, it might be found there ; though there was nothing but the white February snow, instead of the little still white baby, with the early snow-drops on its breast.

Between morning church and afternoon service there wasn't a secret place in the parish that hadn't been searched, or a bush, capable, that hadn't been looked under. My little Will was almost too much taken up to eat his dinner ; and Ann wisely kept him home afterwards ; for he looked upon it something in the light of a play, although it was Sunday ; and if we had come upon it, it would have been a startlement to him. She said always about such things, ' If a child 's to see death let him think it 's the Lord's hushing to sleep, that 's so fast none but He can wake it up ; and don't let them ever come upon it as a common thing.' And so it had

been when our little Fanny was taken—Will going quietly in to kiss her with his mother; and, being only very young then, called the little coffin “Baby’s cradle, where God hushed her to sleep,” always after.

Nothing was brought to light that day, however; and we were talking over it together at night, when a knock comes to the door, and there, as before, was Robins himself.

‘I’m quite ashamed of coming in upon you again,’ he says; ‘and troubling you with our trouble.’

‘Not at all,’ says Ann directly; ‘come in and take a seat by the fire.’

‘Do,’ says I; ‘it’s the coldest February that ever I remember. How’s Molly in her spirits, poor thing?’

‘Well,’ says he, ‘it’s about her I’ve come, and a notion that she’s got into her head that’s a bit of a comfort to her: but you’ll think I’m for ever a-coming to talk over with you—and Sunday evening, too, when you’re quiet together.’

‘The best evening of all for her to get a bit of comfort,’ says Ann: ‘she took on sadly this morning, poor thing, and no wonder.’

‘I hardly seem to know Sunday this week,’ says

poor Robins; 'trouble muddles up all the days, and makes work-days like Sundays, and them like the rest. I was thinking I'd hardly know how to feel going to work to-morrow; and now I shan't, till I gets this found out.'

'But what of Molly?' says I.

'Well, she's got it into her head that that bit of poetry about the angels, that I took notice of here last evening, may have some'ut true in it: it was like this, "Waft her up right to the sky"—no—not that exactly, because it was particular *angels* coming into it: "Waft up angels"—no; but there *was* waft, I know.'

'I'll get down my book,' I says. 'Here it is:—

"Waft her, angels, to the skies."

'That's it exactly,' he says; 'it's got both in it—waft and angels too. Well, I tells that to Molly last night; and it took up her thoughts wonderful, though she was quite of missus's opinion, here, as to what was best to put down under her name and age. And to-night she says, 'Fred,' she says, 'I've got a thought that our little Angela, being named after 'em, it may be they that *have* took her; and there'll be no finding of her here below. I fancy to myself that it's like the line of poetry

that you got down at Master Clarke's; and that she was so pretty and sweet beyond others they took a fancy to her and wafted her up; and I'm glad now I put her on her Sunday-frock and her little cap with the lace in it, though mother was against it. There's no mortal as owes us a grudge to do us such a cruel evil turn; and if it's not been done for evil, it's been done for good; and they're the only ones to do it for that.'

'I've been talking it over,' Robins goes on, 'and telling her it's not likely; and that one's never heard of such being their custom; but yet there's something in her way of putting it, I can't deny. And she seems quite comforted to think of it; and says how that name Angela com'd to her in a dream afore our little one was born; and will have it that shes gone up in quite a special manner; and, at last, "I'll go over, if you like, to Master Clarke," I says, "and get his views, he having more of experience in such dealings; and if he and his missus thinks similar—well, I'll try and hope for the best equilly with you."'

'There's some one better than the angels has taken her up, tell Molly,' says Ann, immediate; 'and as for the poor little perishing corpse, He'll come too to take it, and won't leave it to them.'

That's the best work; and He keeps it for Himself to do.'

'I can't come to that view all in a moment either,' says I, following up Ann; 'not that I don't say, that if ever there *was* a case hard to be accounted for, this here's it. But I've not got what lawyer-chaps calls precedents for Copsley churchyard; though, if you come to that, every one must have had a *first*.'

'Then you think this may be a first?' says Robins, looking from one to the other of us. 'Molly said as how you'd be the best in the parish to give an opinion, next to the Rector; being as much watchman of the churchyard, and to do, if reason should be, with other-world folk as Styles with this one's.'

I don't know that my duties in that line had ever been thrown with that light upon them before; and I kept thinking to myself whether, Molly's notion having any sort of foundation or it, there was any call for the future for me to be on duty now and then of a night to watch, there having come a *first* to our churchyard—at least, if it was so. Ann never had any sort of belief in spirit-world stories beyond what's written for us in the Bible; but then, as I always said to her, 'there's

facts handed down when parish-clerks has been in one family for generations, which descends with, and in a manner belongs to the church-keys, and candle-box and brushes, not to mention picks and barrow, together with other implements of the profession; and the proud lady of Beverley, come down from father to son for ever so many years, isn't lightly to be put aside: over and above that views hinted at with a nod, though one wouldn't commit one's self fully, gives weight to the office.' But there, unlike most things, we wasn't one.

'Tell Molly,' I says, 'that I'll think upon it, and give it the best of my consideration; and look over what writings remains to me of my father's for a chance of finding any words bearing on angels taking to resurrectioning without special occasion: but I doubt there being any such on record; and I'd advise you, as I intend the same myself, not to give up looking out for the poor little dear—meaning, all what's left of her below.'

'And tell Molly from me,' says Ann, with quite a strength in her voice, 'that whatever's come of the poor little body—though it's real hard on her, and on you too, Fred—it's only a seed-corn that's not lost from the Lord's eyes, though it's unaccountable to us; and that meantime she's with

my little one safe before the throne ; and nothing that's stolen away the outside shell can touch the spirit that He's redeemed Himself.'

It was just Ann's way of comforting—always getting it straight from heaven ; which was why her words was sweeter, and stronger, and fresher than other folks. Poor dear ! she needed it all for her own hard struggle ; and she got it, too, right to the last ; till I laid her, and all my heart for this world with her, down by our little Fanny, sleeping peaceful, as she would say, till the Lord's waking-time should come.

Well, Robins went away, bringing all back to Molly as we had said—a good-hearted, kind lad as ever was ; and after he'd shut the door, he turns back again, and opens it, and says, ' Will you please to give me those words over again, missus, as you said the last ? I'm going them over, but can't make them quite right yet ; though there's a deal of comfort sounding in them.'

Which when she had done, he goes off, his footsteps sounding muffled-like on the thick snow.

And truly, as we thought over it, it seemed more strange than ever, and I was quite at a loss. So was Ann, though a woman as penetrating as ever was known. The question was always the

same—Who'd have done it for ill-will? Answer—None. Who'd have done it for good-will? Answer, again—None. Then who's done it at all? Answer—There's the question!

I went over and over it in my mind all that night, even in my dreams; but couldn't bring myself to any satisfaction; nor could I, going out to see after my work. But when I came home to dinner, the children being out of the way, Ann says to me, 'William, I'm pretty sure I've got hold of the right person.'

'Never!' I says.

'I think so,' she says; 'and none other than Mar Topham.'

'What makes you think so?' I says.

'His ways,' she makes answer; 'and the look in his face.'

'What's he been doing?' I asks, all attention.

'Hanging about part of the time; and then making off, and looking behind to see that nobody should think to follow him. When you was gone out, he comes to me, and, "Master gone out?" he says. I nodded that you was.

"Digging deep?" he says.

'I says "No;" but he doesn't heed, but goes on, "Deep, deep, deeper yet! but it's cold—

cold !” And then I looked up in his poor, foolish face, and it was full of trouble and care, and was so worn and pinched that I called him in, and gave him a cup of bread and milk. Those Tophams never seem to look after that poor lad any more than if he didn’t belong to them ; and he’ll get worse mischeevous than ever if some one doesn’t take to him more kindly.’

‘ Well, but what more ?’ I asks ; ‘ for those are only his silly ways, that have been for years.’

‘ He was quite hungry and shivering,’ she goes on, ‘ and ate it up most like a wolf ; then he puts out the cup, and says “ More.”

“ No,” I says, “ I can’t give you more now, Mar.”

“ Some for her,” he says ; and then goes on, “ Cold ! cold !”

“ For who ?” I inquires ; and he nods and winks mysterious, and can only be got to say, “ Cold ! so cold—so cold !”

‘ A thought comes into my mind all of a sudden ; and “ Mar,” I says, “ where’s the baby ?” patting his shoulder, and speaking kind to him. He nods and winks again ever so much more ; and then says, imitating you digging with the shovel, took up immediate for a spade, “ Deep ! deep ! deeper yet !” and then, as if he’d come to something, stoops down,

and folds his arms together, and presses them on his bosom, saying all the time, in a shiver, "Cold! so cold!" And then he runs away, looking back to see if I was following him, which I couldn't not then in the snow. But I'm sure he's got it somewhere.'

'It's more likely than Molly's angels,' I says; 'but only that. Why, I shouldn't have thought he'd have had strength, let alone knowledge, to do it. However, I'll dodge him. Don't you say nothing to any one yet.'

Which I did twice that afternoon; but Mar, looking back all of a sudden, gets suspicious, and leads me off on false scents into the snow, and once, half a mile to a pond; and points in there, and says, nodding, 'Master—deep! deep! you dig in there and find how deep it is;' which settled me in my mind, after asking him questions with no other answer got, that if he had done as Ann said, he had thrown it into the pond, and it had got frozen over in the night of Saturday.

It was getting dusk that day, when, coming down from the Rectory, where I had been for orders, I sees my wife going in at our door with something wrapped in her shawl, and Ma^r Topham dogging her heels in a slouching, shivering sort of manner. I follows in, but she hadn't unrolled her

shawl; only saying to our little ones to go upstairs, and stay till they was called. They never thought for a moment to question her word, and was gone directly; and then, as gently as if it was alive, Ann unfolds Molly's little dead baby, and smoothes its clothes, her tears falling over it all the time.

'I'll take care of it now, Mar,' she says kindly; 'you go home.'

'Cold!' says Mar, looking wishfully at her, and yet seemingly relieved at her taking charge.

'Yes,' says she; 'very very cold: but I've got it here in my arms, and you go home; and I'll give you some bread and milk again to-morrow, and I'll take care of baby. Go, poor fellow: go, now.'

He slunk off, and she asked me to bolt the door; and then I fetched the little coffin that I had put up safe in a cupboard, Robins wishing it well out of Molly's way; and before she would speak, the little dead corpse was laid out again, tender and gentle—for it's only women's hands that from the first was fit to lay out the dead—and shut down, and put away out of the children's sight. Then Ann, quite worn out and tired, rests back in her chair saying, 'They'll be a bit comforted now, poor things! William, could you ask Robins to step over?'

We was back together in five minutes ; and I brings him to the cupboard ; and he looks in, and sees the little one in, as quiet as if it hadn't ever been disturbed, and seems most upset himself, though saying how he thanked Heaven it was safe found ; and then he asks in a breath who it was ; for I hadn't said a word in our hurry coming across.

‘ Mar Topham,’ says Ann.

‘ Whew . . . !’ he says : ‘ young scoundrel ! I’ll teach him to bring trouble like that upon folks as was always kind to him ! Only let me catch hold of him——’

‘ No, Fred,’ says my wife, putting her hand on his, as if to keep him back ; ‘ No, Fred, you must never be hard on that poor lad ; but love him pitiful for his great love to your little one.’

‘ How was it ?’ he says, half sulky.

‘ I got my suspicions this morning,’ she says, ‘ which I made known to William, and told him what they was. And this afternoon, Mar comes lurking about once more, looking more troubled than ever ; and after a time I says to him, kind-like, “ Some more bread and milk, Mar ? ” and when I gave it to him, he sets hungry to work again ; and I says, “ Poor little baby’s so cold and hungry.

You bring her some to warm her." On that he looks up at me with a sort of scare in his eyes, as if I'd found out his secret, and says, "Hush—hush-sh! so cold!" and then, after a time, takes up what was in the mug—and he'd only eaten half—and says, nodding, "Mug and all?"

'Yes,' I says, and goes on as if we was one together in it, and I knew all about it. "Poor little cold baby! so cold!" On which he nods again, and goes out, looking back that I shouldn't follow him; and hearing him go round the back of the house, I runs to the top window, and hiding behind the curtain watches him cross Hayworth's field, and go over the stile at the end, all the time peering round every now and then to see that none was following him. Then, he being out of sight, I puts on my shawl over my head, and makes haste, thinking of Molly, to go along that way.'

'Suppose he'd turned savage?' says Robins; 'that sort often does when they're caught in a secret.'

'I thought of that,' says my wife, quite quiet; but it was work put before me, and one's never out of Keeping in that case; and any one rough, as men are apt to be, might have frightened that poor silly fellow into worse weakness of his mind than

before, instead of taking it away gentle, and he not scared, poor lad.

‘ Well, I got as well as I could over Hayworth’s field, and stopped against the stile for a minute to rest my side; and then sees his footsteps up the lane quite plain—a different way from any that was searched—and follows on, near half a mile, to the new cottage that’s building, and was stopped by the frost. There was no steps beyond; and inside I could hear Mar’s voice talking to somebody. So I creeps round the back-way as quiet as possible, and looks in where the place is left for a window in what’ll hereafter be the back kitchen. And there was Mar, his back to me, sitting on a bench, holding the little dead baby in his arms, tenderer than a mother, and trying to persuade it with the bread and milk I’d given him. He’s got hold of some of Molly’s mother-talk, for it’s little he’s had for himself, poor fellow! and this was the way he went :—“ Nicee for baby—nice and warm, darling : baby open her eyes and drink it. Cold ! cold ! so cold ! Wrap her warm in Mar’s arms, and hush-a-bye.” And with that he pulls off his poor bit of a jacket to put round her, and then begins again :—“ Cold ! cold ! poor baby ! so cold !” and breaks out, rocking of her all the while,—

“ Little baby we will go
Some one day,
Over the mountains and over the snow,
Far away.”

‘ And I, knowing that she was there already, and that poor fond fellow left behind, tendering over her little cold form, couldn’t keep from crying to myself; while all the time I was thinking how to get her away, and yet not to anger him. So I goes round to the door, and knocks; and there’s no answer for a minute—he a-hiding her away under his coat. Then I knocks again, and “ You get out,” he says inside, “ or I’ll have at yer.” “ Not at me, Mar,” I says, “ for I gived you that nice bread and milk for baby. Has she took it yet ?” He opens the door quite cautious. “ Master ain’t there ?” he asks. “ No,” says I—“ nobody but me; and my shawl’s warmer for her than your jacket, poor fellow!—See, it’s nice and soft ;” and with that he feels it over, nodding his head.

“ Where is she ?” I says.

“ Asleep still,” he says ; “ I can’t waken her, and it’s time she woke.”

“ Give her to me,” I says, “ and let me try her.”

‘ He looks out cautious, to see nobody was behind ; and then goes to the settle that was against

the window-place, and takes up his jacket, and gives his sort of cry over the poor little dead thing ; and then brings her to me as careful as Molly would, while I covers my shawl over her in that perishing place.

“ Cold ! ” he says, shivering—“ cold—cold ! ”

“ Yes,” I says ; “ why did you bring her here, Mar ? ”

“ Master dug deep—deep—and they put her away all cold, and none to mind her,” he says, “ and not a drop of milk for her. Mar, he comes in the night, and he calls to her, ‘ Little un ! ’ he says, and couldn’t hear nought—down so deep ; and then thinks she’s a crying. Fetches master’s spade, and digs down ever so deep. There’s box. Box hard, and cold, too. Breaks box. She’s asleep there, but so cold. Brings her here to warm her, for fear they’d get her again.”

“ Come home with me, Mar,” I says ; “ that milk’s all cold now. Look here, she’s safe in my shawl, and I’ll keep her warm across the fields.” He was beginning to sulk, but I was off already ; he treading in my steps, and calling out about the cold.

‘ And now Fred, what you and Molly have got to do is to be kind to that poor silly boy, that

loved your little one so much, and has been out in the cold nights trying to bring her back to you. We was warm and quiet in bed that freezing Saturday night ; but he was out in the snow, his heart breaking for your baby, and his poor bit of strength all bent upon doing what no mortal love can do for her ; and his scanty clothing—all that he could give—thrown round her ; and he, one as has never had any one to care for him, hardly to throw him a kind word. I declare, it humbles one to think of his being faithful and loving to her even beyond death ; and the world so cold and hard to him all his days.'

We was all quiet for a moment ; then Robins begins, and says,—' Tell you what, Mrs. Clarke, there's not another would have done what you've done for us—no, not in all Copsley ; and though it'll be a come-down to my poor Molly, who's given it out rather freely about the angels taking a fancy to our poor little one that's gone, it's relief untold to my mind to have it all brought out clear, thanks to you. And as for Mar Topham, why, I'll never be the one to lay a hand on him, poor lad ! though he mustn't be at such work again.'

It was a strange sort of funeral that we had

that night—we two men alone burying the little coffin again, without so much as a prayer over it, and almost feeling as if we was doing something unlawful. And, as was best, Molly gave in to there being no more monument than the grass mound and the daisies, after all. Many's the time I've thought of it since, when Robinses is buried and married, how the first of them was resurrectioned, and laid down again by their father and me together, in the night.

Mar Topham, having lost all that looked after him when my poor wife died, took to mischeevousness; and at last was put by his own father in the workhouse; changing parents for guardians, and not losing much by the same; which is contrary to general experience.

And that's the way the saying has come round in the parish for people that won't let a quarrel rest, or anything they've fancied wrong die out—though I won't mention names—that 'they're folks of Mar Topham's trade.'

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